



**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime

# ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant–Toddler Educators™

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ZERO TO THREE is a national, nonprofit organization that provides parents, professionals, and policymakers the knowledge and know-how to nurture early development.

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# Introduction

ZERO TO THREE's mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life. ZERO TO THREE provides parents, professionals, and policymakers the knowledge and know-how to nurture early development. Established in 1977 by researchers and clinicians in the fields of child development, early intervention, child trauma, mental health, early care and education, family support, and pediatrics, ZERO TO THREE translates science and knowledge—especially information about early experiences that help children thrive—into a range of professional development, practical tools, and systems resources for use by adults who influence the lives of young children.



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In support of our mission and to help meet urgent needs, we are pleased to publish *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant–Toddler Educators™*. The *Critical Competencies* are part of ZERO TO THREE's evidence-based infant-toddler workforce services that meet the greatest needs, offer customized flexibility to fit with state infrastructures and systems already in place, and build on national criteria to support stackable and portable professional development. Implementation and professional development services are provided through ZERO TO THREE's Workforce Innovations team; more information about these services is included in [Appendix III](#).

## Purpose

*ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant–Toddler Educators™*:

- Support educators who work in group settings (center-based and family child care homes) with infants, toddlers, or both
- Focus on pedagogy—the method and practice of teaching
- Detail essential and observable skill sets that effective early educators use to optimize babies' and toddlers' (1) social–emotional, (2) cognitive, and (3) language and literacy development
- Feature considerations for working with [high-needs populations](#)
- Offer considerations for supporting dual-/multi-language learners

### Critical Competencies' Focus

Caring for infants and toddlers requires a holistic approach. Educators play a key role in supporting and nurturing all aspects of infant–toddler learning and development. In the best case scenarios, educators partner with families; create systems of primary care; set-up environments that protect, engage, challenge, and nurture learning and development; and coordinate with colleagues across sectors and disciplines to provide comprehensive services.

However, ZERO TO THREE chose to focus the *Critical Competencies* on a subset of teacher–child interaction skills that support optimal infant and toddler social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, especially for children from high-needs populations and those who are dual-/multi-language learners.

Why? Because:

- Recent advances in child development research have indicated that strong teacher–child interactions within these discrete areas of learning and development are most closely associated with children’s success in school and life, particularly for children at risk (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Curby et al., 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2007; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007; Mashburn et al., 2008).
- Roughly one fifth of the U.S. population understands or speaks two or more languages (Grosjean, 2010). One quarter of children born today in the US are welcomed by immigrant families, with their own native language and culture. Early educators need to acquire culturally and linguistically competent knowledge and skills to intentionally support infants and toddlers raised in multilingual and multicultural environments.
- For decades ZERO TO THREE has helped individuals, programs, systems, partners, and other stakeholders to define and describe best practices for infant–toddler teaching. Through this collaborative work, it became clear that there was little information available about how infant and toddler educators apply foundational knowledge in a group setting, what infant–toddler teaching and learning looks like in practice, and what specific skills educators need to optimize children’s learning opportunities.
- The *Critical Competencies* are intended to address what ZERO TO THREE sees as gaps in the knowledge-to-practice cycle that promotes high-quality care and education for infants and toddlers. The specific skills outlined in this document describe what educators can do to make the most of teacher–child interactions, to turn them into valuable learning opportunities that support infants’ and toddlers’ social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development.
- The *Critical Competencies* advance the call from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council’s (NRC) committee report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (2015) to specifically support the infant–toddler workforce, develop specific and specialized competencies for this population that build on those for all of the early care and education workforce, and ensure that these competencies address the cross-cultural skills needed to work with diverse populations.

In particular, concerted attention is needed to incorporate ... the workforce development needs of those who provide care and education for infants and toddlers. These professionals have historically had the weakest, least explicit and coherent, and least resourced infrastructure for professional learning and workforce supports. (IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 504)

Professionals need foundational and specific competencies ... are best able to help young children ... when they have a shared foundation of knowledge and competencies... This foundation needs to be augmented by shared specialized knowledge and competencies within a type of profession, as well as further differentiated competencies that depend on specialty or discipline and age group. (IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 494)

Professionals need to be able to support diverse populations. Care and education professionals, with the support of the systems in which they practice, need to be able to respectfully, effectively, and equitably serve children from backgrounds that are diverse with respect to family structure, socioeconomic status, culture, language, and ability. (IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 494)

An important part of the formative work for agencies and organizations ... supporting children ... at the national, state, and local levels is to assess and revise as needed any current statements of professional competencies ... and to review the extent to which all professional learning and workforce development opportunities, policies, and supports are informed by and aligned with those competencies. (IOM & NRC, 2015 p. 504)

## Potential Uses

Educator competencies can serve an important role for multiple stakeholders including: individual educators, collaborating professionals, program administrators, professional development (training, technical assistance, and higher education) providers and their organizations/agencies/institutions, and as a basis for professional development systems. Attainment and application of critical knowledge and skills can improve educator effectiveness. But translating key knowledge into practice can be a daunting challenge for educators, professional development providers, and the systems that support them.

First and foremost, the national and evidence-based critical skills defined by *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™* can be used by all stakeholders to build a shared understanding of what effective and specific teaching skills that support infants' and toddlers' social-emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development look like. The *Critical Competencies* provide concrete skill statements and practice examples to help these professionals and the systems that support them successfully bridge the knowledge to practice process. Although, as mentioned earlier, educating and caring for young children requires a holistic approach, and the skills to support them are intertwined, the *Critical Competencies* intentionally separate out specific skills in each of the three developmental areas to provide clear and focused guidance.

Table 1 provides some additional potential uses of *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™* by stakeholder roles. The examples are intended to be illustrative, not an exhaustive list of every potential use. A central tenet of the early care and education field is the individual context at the heart of each child's development. Similarly, the individual context of early childhood educators, programs, communities, and systems influence the potential uses of these competencies. In that vein, not every potential purpose listed here will be relevant to each and every stakeholder, and some of the suggested examples may be applicable to multiple stakeholders. To be meaningful, these competencies (and truly any standards) must be used appropriately in the unique context of the individual educator, program, agency, organization, institution, community, or system.

**Table 1: Potential Uses of ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™**

Stakeholders	Additional Potential Uses
Individual educators	Reflect on current practice, assess current competencies, identify areas for growth, and plan for professional development
Program administrators	Specify competencies for roles and job descriptions; reflect on and evaluate staff performance; frame and record professional development needs, plans, goals, and achievements
Professional preparation and development (training, technical assistance, and higher education) providers	Inform and frame professional development goals, objectives, expected outcomes, and other elements of content and design; categorize and publicize opportunities
Organizations/institutions/ agencies that design or deliver professional development	Set or align professional development content; ensure aligned requirements; coordinate, categorize, and align offerings; facilitate modularized, stackable, transferable offerings and articulation agreements
Professional development systems	Assess current offerings and identify overlaps and gaps; plan for priority needs; categorize, promote, and track opportunities; frame expectations of competency and career progression

Please also see [Appendix III](#) for ZERO TO THREE's related implementation services.

# Creating the Competencies

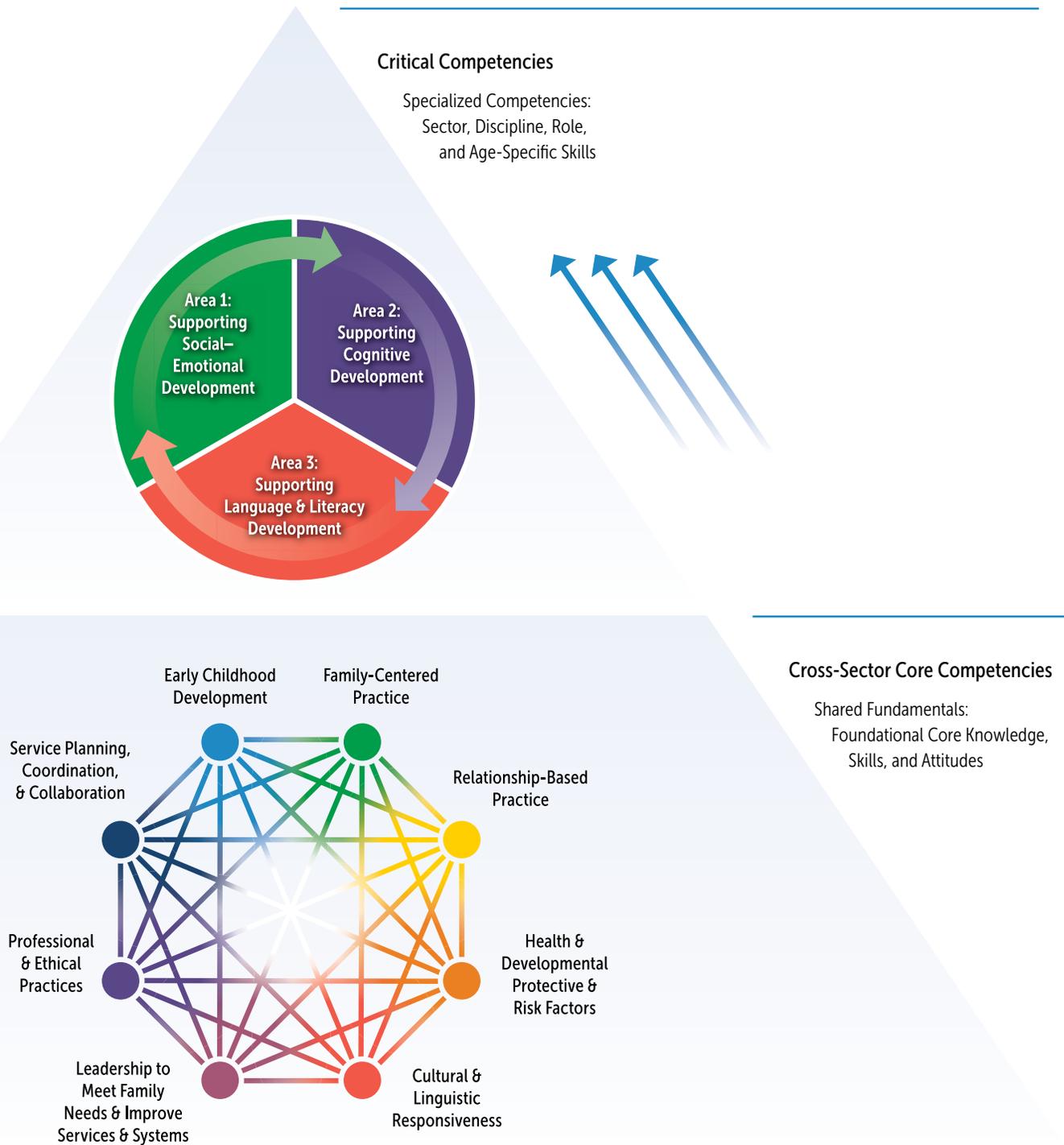
The authors used three primary sources to inform and enhance the development of *ZERO TO THREE's Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™*:

1. **Current evidence base:** research and literature reviews on the art and science of teaching, adult development, child development, and the powerful influence of teacher–child interactions on children’s social and academic outcomes
2. **Workforce and systems status:** early care and education workforce demographics; status of professional development systems, initiatives, and policies that include or focus on infant–toddler educators
3. **Expertise:**
  - **ZERO TO THREE’s expertise:** board and staff experience and expert knowledge in and about system-, program-, and individual-practitioner level early childhood issues and research, including decades of providing policy and systems support, producing evidence-based content, and supporting adult development across the early childhood disciplines
  - **Partners’ expertise:** reviews and feedback from partners that own related criteria, additional field and content experts, and insights and feedback from participants in pilot sites

## Foundation of Cross-Sector Core Competencies

ZERO TO THREE believes that there are core knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed by professionals in all disciplines who work with young children and their families. The *Critical Competencies* build on this foundation provided by ZERO TO THREE’s *Cross-Sector Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age 5 Field* (2015), developed as part of a project that was generously funded by First 5 LA (see Figure 1 on the following page). The *Cross-Sector Core Competencies* present a universal set of competencies necessary for all prenatal–5 service providers, supervisors, and managers. The *Cross-Sector Core Competencies* are not designed to replace existing, discipline-specific competencies such as the *Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators* defined in this document. Rather, they have a broad purpose to strengthen professional competence on shared fundamental concepts and to facilitate cross-sector partnerships and coordinated service delivery. The *Cross-Sector Competencies* also provide a foundation for collaboration and professional development to deepen and support work within five sectors: (1) early care and education, (2) early identification and intervention, (3) mental health, (4) physical health, and (5) child welfare and social services.

Figure 1. Critical Competencies Build on the Foundation of the Cross-Sector Core Competencies



### Overarching Principles

ZERO TO THREE's *Cross-Sector Core Competencies* and the *Critical Competencies* embrace and integrate the principles set forth in the [Irving Harris Foundation's Diversity-Informed Infant Mental Health Tenets](#) (n.d.; The Tenets have been reproduced here with permission of the Irving Harris Foundation.). These 10 Tenets provide a diversity, inclusion, and fairness lens that can and should be applied to all practices and services aimed at supporting infants, toddlers, and their families. Some Tenets' details are explicitly called out throughout the *Critical Competencies* to highlight examples of how inclusive teaching methods and practices can apply a diversity, inclusion, and fairness lens.

The first Diversity-Informed Tenet is:

1. Self-Awareness Leads to Better Services for Families

The first Tenet articulates an important underlying assumption of the *Critical Competencies*—that awareness of practice is an important contributor to creating the capacity and willingness to change. And readiness to change is an essential part of intentionality in teaching; excellent teaching requires intentional teachers. The *Critical Competencies* can help educators examine their own practices and increase their awareness of explicit teaching methods and approaches they can employ to provide optimal learning and development experiences for infants and toddlers.

Tenets 2 through 10 are presented by the Irving Harris foundation in three sections: stance toward infants and families, practice/research field principles, and broader advocacy.

#### Stance Toward Infants and Families

2. Champion Children's Rights Globally
3. Work to Acknowledge Privilege and Combat Discrimination
4. Recognize and Respect Nondominant Bodies of Knowledge
5. Honor Diverse Family Structures

#### Practice/Research Field Principles

6. Understand That Language Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal
7. Support Families in Their Preferred Language
8. Allocate Resources to Systems Change
9. Make Space and Open Pathways for Diverse Professionals

#### Broader Advocacy

10. Advance Policy that Supports All Families

### Relationship to Other Relevant Criteria

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) sets the broad professional standards that encompass the core knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed by all early educators. National partners and state and other systems also define competencies for early educators and related roles in multiple disciplines. *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant Toddler Educators™* are not intended to cover all the core competencies required for early educators or for professionals who work in other disciplines with infants and toddlers. Rather, they are designed to fill an identified gap and intentionally complement related criteria.

In partnership with the organizations below, the *Critical Competencies* have been crosswalked with the following related criteria for the early care and education and allied fields:

- [National Association for the Education of Young Children's \(NAEYC\) Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation](#) (NAEYC, 2009)
- Council for Professional Recognition's [Child Development Associate \(CDA\) Credential™ competency standards](#) (n.d.)
- [Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health \(MI-AIMH\) Competency Guidelines®](#) (2014) for Infant Family Associates
- [Division for Early Childhood's \(DEC\) Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education](#) (2014)
- [WestEd's Program for Infant/Toddler Care \(PITC\) topics and objectives](#) (n.d.)
- Collaborative for Understanding the Pedagogy of Infant/Toddler Development's (CUPID) [Draft Competencies for the Infant/Toddler Workforce](#) (2015)
- [Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors](#) (n.d.)

ZERO TO THREE is grateful to the Irving Harris Foundation and the owners of the above criteria for their ongoing partnership to support the early childhood workforce. Their willingness and time to review these *Critical Competencies* and to confirm relationships with their related criteria is especially appreciated. [Appendix I](#) provides further details about, and a matrix outlining the relationships of, the listed criteria areas with *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™*. The "[Contributors](#)" section credits the specific members of the partners' staff who contributed to reviews and development.

ZERO TO THREE also suggests alignment between the *Critical Competencies* and the following selected infant–toddler/teacher observation tools:

- [Quality of Caregiver-Child Interaction for Infants and Toddlers](#) (Q-CCIIT) draft indicators (Atkins-Burnett et al., 2015)
- [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS®\)](#) tool for infants (Hamre, La Paro, Pianta, & LoCasale-Crouch, 2014)
- [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS®\)](#) tool for toddlers (La Paro, Hamre, & Pianta, 2012)
- [Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale](#)—Revised Edition (ITERS-R; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006)

In addition, ZERO TO THREE suggests correlations between the *Critical Competencies* and the child development outcomes described in the new [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). These suggestions provide one example of the relationship between national criteria that describes what infants and toddlers are expected to know,

understand, and be able to do and what the adults who care for and educate them should know, understand, and do to support the child development outcomes.

The suggested alignments with the selected infant–toddler/teacher observation tools and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework are also available in [Appendix I](#).

Figure 2 illustrates how the *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™* and its foundation of *Cross-Sector Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age 5 Field* (ZERO TO THREE, 2015) fit into the tiered representation of shared and specialized standards articulated in the report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (IOM & NRC, 2015).

Figure 2. Where ZERO TO THREE Competencies Fit in IOM & NRC’s Tiered Representation of Shared and Specialized Standards

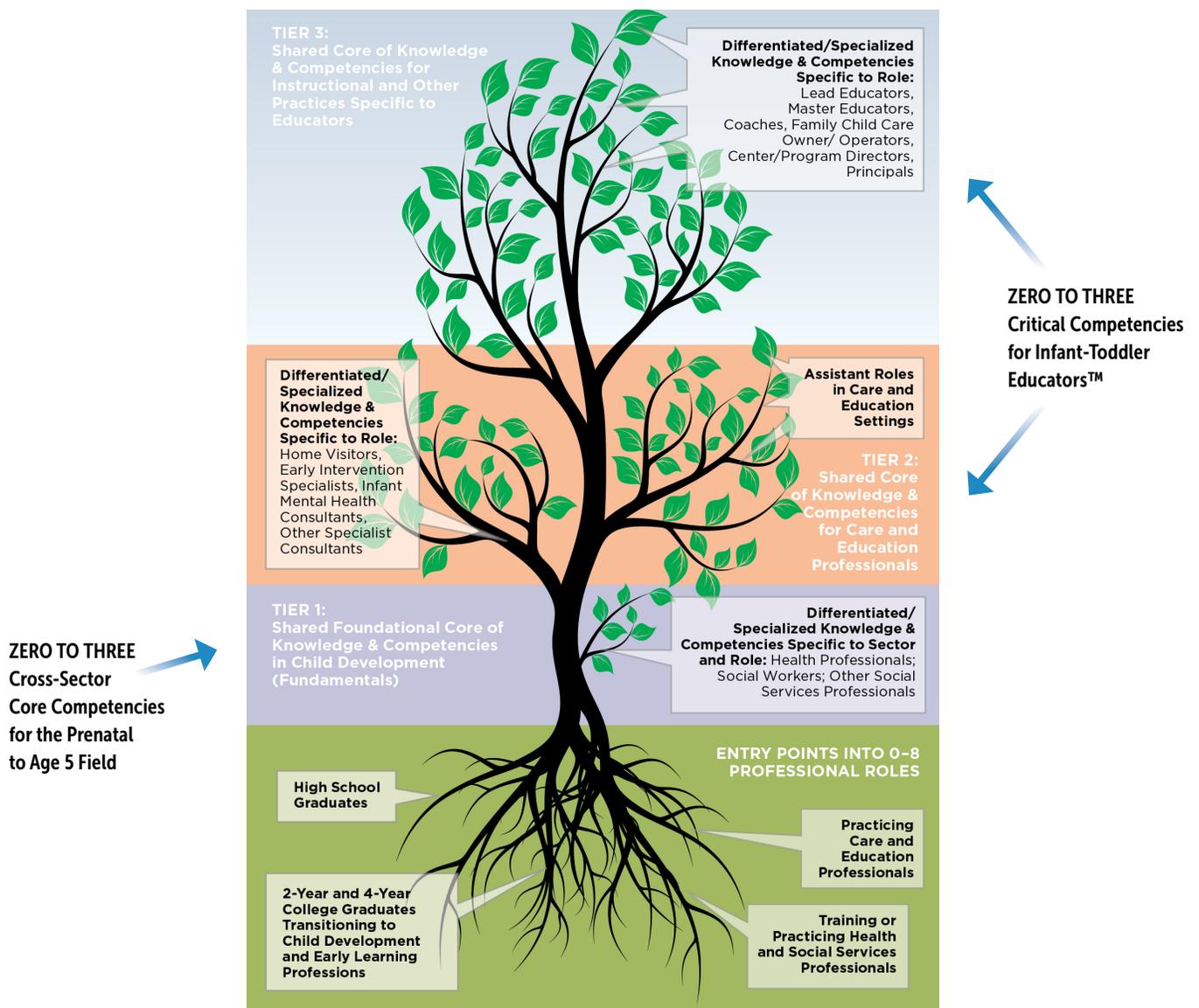


Figure 2. Source: Reprinted with permission from *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015, p. 430, by the National Academy of Sciences, courtesy of the National Academies Press, Washington, DC.

### Contributors

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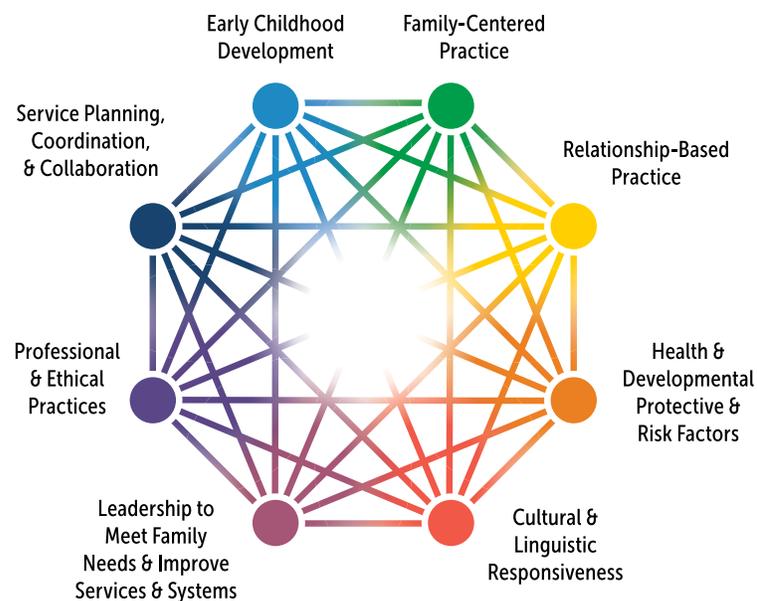
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# ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant–Toddler Educators™

## Core Knowledge and Attitudes Summary

As described in the introduction section of this document, the *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant–Toddler Educators™* build on the core knowledge and attitudes defined in ZERO TO THREE's *Cross-Sector Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age 5 Field (2015)*. The *Cross-Sector Core Competencies* describe essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes that any professional working with young children needs, in eight domains as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The Eight Cross-Sector Core Competency Domains



The following summarizes some of the core knowledge base and required attitudes in the *Cross-Sector Core Competencies'* eight domains (the summaries include a parenthetical reference to the knowledge [K] or attitude [A] numbering system used in the *Cross-Sector Core Competencies*). These core knowledge and attitudes are an essential foundation for the explicit teaching skills that support infant and toddler social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development that is the focus of the *Critical Competencies*.

## Domain #1. Early Childhood Development

To effectively support infants' and toddlers' social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, educators must:

- understand typical and atypical growth and development (K1.2); developmental processes (K1.6); risk and protective factors (K1.4); and the roles of young children, their families and communities, and themselves in the development of infants and toddlers (K1.5-13)
- assess the relevance of research and professional resources (K1.4), and articulate the current evidence base (K1.3)
- value and support each child as an individual with unique strengths, needs, and developmental trajectory (A1.1), in an inclusive setting (A1.2)
- respect the influential and central role of culture on developmental expectations and teaching, and continually seek information and understanding of cultural practices different from their own (A1.3)

## Domain #2. Family-Centered Practice

To effectively support infants' and toddlers' social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, educators must:

- explain the developmental importance of consistent and responsive relationships with infants and toddlers (K2.1)
- understand the role of families in supporting young children's learning and development (K2.2); the diversity of families (e.g., cultural, ability, health) and their influence on infant and toddler development (K2.2-6)
- respect the primary role of families in the development of their child(ren) (A2.1), and of their culture and its influence on relationships and development (A2.3-5)
- consider one's own biases and beliefs and how they might influence teaching approaches and practices (A2.2)

## Domain #3. Relationship-Based Practice

To effectively support infants' and toddlers' social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, educators must:

- understand that relationships serve as the foundation for child development (K3.1), successfully engaging families (K3.3), and cross-sector collaborations that are essential to support optimal development (K3.5)
- know current evidence base and related professional resources about these key relationships and strategies to support them (K3.2, K3.6)
- value, create, and model positive, open, and respectful relationships with children, families, and collaborators (A3.1-4)

## Domain #4. Health and Developmental Protective and Risk Factors

To effectively support infants' and toddlers' social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, educators must:

- understand what the biological, health, social, cultural, and emotional factors are that affect children's optimal development and how these protective and risk factors affect the developmental trajectory of all children (K4.1-2)
- understand the importance and impact of individual, family, and community context and broader health and social service systems on child development (K4.6, K4.8)
- identify concrete supports that may help families in times of need (K4.7)
- know current evidence base and related professional resources on protective and risk factors (K4.9)
- view protective and risk factors through a strengths-based perspective, and have a respectful, flexible, and open attitude toward collaborating to help families address risk factors (A4.1-3)

## Domain #5. Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

To effectively support infants' and toddlers' social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, educators must:

- understand and respect the role culture has in shaping individual values, beliefs, and behaviors (K5.1)
- know cultural assets and barriers in order to use culturally responsive methods that can be incorporated into one's work with children, families, communities, and collaborators to support optimal child development (K5.2-5)
- interact respectfully with families and collaborators from a cross-section of cultural and ethnic backgrounds (A5.2) based on current, culturally relevant information and individual family preferences (A5.1)
- reflect on one's own cultural values and attitudes (A5.4) and seek professional growth and learning to best support the population served (A5.6-7)

## Domain #6. Leadership to Meet Family Needs and Improve Services and Systems

To effectively support infants' and toddlers' social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, educators must:

- recognize diverse leadership styles (K6.4), and the role of other partners (families, other service providers, and community members and leaders) in supporting optimal child development (K6.5)
- understand their own role and responsibility, and respect the contribution of other partners in providing, promoting, improving, and advocating for evidence- and strengths-based, coordinated, responsive services and systems (K6.1, K6.2, A6.2)
- assume a leadership role in advocating for families and young children with special needs (K6.3)
- practice and be accountable for their own, and support other partners', ongoing learning and reflection about the latest research, evidence-informed practices, and innovative systems and service delivery models (A6.1)

## Domain #7. Professional and Ethical Practices

To effectively support infants' and toddlers' social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, educators must:

- understand, reflect upon, and work toward continual adherence to legal and ethical practices and policies related to working with young children and their families and their own related responsibilities (K7.1, K7.3, K7.4, A7.5)
- be knowledgeable about laws regarding early intervention, special education, and child maltreatment, and how to follow related mandated reporting procedures (K7.2)
- acknowledge their own scope of practice and be open to and welcoming of cross-disciplinary collaboration (A7.1, A7.3)
- be responsible for their own personal physical and mental health and understand the impact of it on infants, toddlers, families, and other partners (A7.2)
- acknowledge their own biases, values, beliefs, and attitudes and their influence on practice and relationships (A7.4)
- actively reflect on and strengthen their abilities to heighten self-awareness and improve practice (A7.4)

**Overarching Principles: Details from the Irving Harris Foundation's *Diversity-Informed Infant Mental Health Tenets***

**Self-Awareness Leads to Better Services for Families:** Professionals ... must reflect on their own culture, personal values, and beliefs, and on the impact racism, classism, sexism, able-ism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other systems of oppression have had on their lives in order to provide diversity-informed, culturally attuned services on behalf of infants, toddlers, and their families. (Irving Harris Foundation, n.d.)

## Domain #8. Service Planning, Coordination, and Collaboration

To effectively support infants' and toddlers' social–emotional, cognitive, and language and literacy development, educators must:

- understand their role as part of a system of services that supports the multiple needs of infants, toddlers, and their families, referral processes, community resources, and available supports (A8.3, K8.4)
- value and actively engage in collaborating with families and other partners to communicate effectively, identify goals, assess strengths and risk factors, and best meet individual child and family needs (K8.1, K8.2, K8.3, A8.1, A8.2, A8.4)
- have an open and creative attitude in their practice approaches, and work to enhance their own skills in planning, coordinating, and implementing cross-sector strategies (A8.5, A8.6)

## Critical Competency Areas

In addition to the core, foundational knowledge and attitudes for all professionals who work with infants and toddlers (summarized in the previous section), specialized competencies are needed for infant–toddler professionals who care for and educate children in an early childhood setting outside of the child’s home. Because these critical competencies are intended specifically for educators who work in group settings with infants, toddlers, or both, they focus specifically on pedagogy—the method and practice of teaching—and feature considerations for working with high-needs populations and dual-/multi-language learners.

These *Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators* are presented in three broad learning and development areas:

- [Area 1: Supporting Social–Emotional Development](#)
- [Area 2: Supporting Cognitive Development](#)
- [Area 3: Supporting Language and Literacy Development](#)

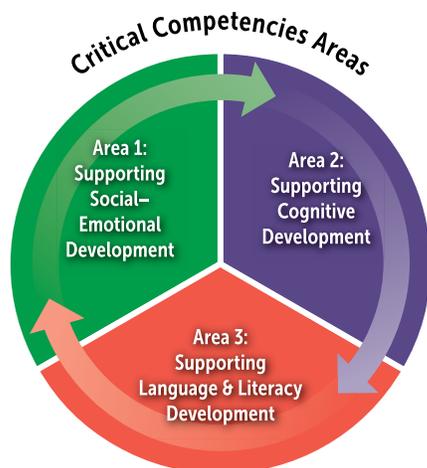
Each of these three broad learning and development areas include:

- an overview of the developmental area for infants and toddlers
- a summary of infant–toddler educators’ role in supporting development in the area

There are a total of 13 sub-areas that comprise the three broad learning and development areas as illustrated in Figure 4. Each of these sub-areas include:

- specific, pedagogy-focused skill statements
  - brief examples when the skill statements are best exemplified through an educator’s verbal support
- considerations for working with high-needs populations and dual-/multi-language learners
- examples in practice with young infants, mobile infants, and toddlers

Figure 4. Critical Competencies Areas and Sub-Areas



### Critical Competencies Sub-Areas

#### Supporting Social–Emotional Development

1. Building Warm, Positive, and Nurturing Relationships
2. Providing Consistent and Responsive Caregiving
3. Supporting Emotional Expression and Regulation
4. Promoting Socialization
5. Guiding Behavior
6. Promoting Children’s Sense of Identity and Belonging

#### Supporting Cognitive Development

7. Facilitating Exploration and Concept Development
8. Building Meaningful Curriculum
9. Promoting Imitation, Symbolic Representation, and Play
10. Supporting Reasoning and Problem Solving

#### Supporting Language & Literacy Development

11. Promoting Communication Exchange
12. Expanding Expressive and Receptive Language and Vocabulary
13. Promoting Early Literacy



## About the Considerations for Working With Vulnerable Populations

Educators can use the *Considerations for Working With Vulnerable Populations* subsections in this document to reflect on ways they could adjust their practice to best meet the individual needs of infants and toddlers from “high-need populations.”

The U.S. Department of Education defines high-need children this way:

*High-Need Children means children from birth until kindergarten entry who are from low-income families or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, including children who have disabilities or developmental delays, who are English learners, who reside on ‘Indian lands’ as that term is defined by Section 8013(6) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, of 1965, who are migrant, homeless, or in foster care; and other children as identified by the State.* (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.)

It is important to recognize that although some children experience all or many of the conditions that are included in the definition of high needs, other children do not. For example, not all children with disabilities come from low-income families. Indeed, many children with special needs enjoy significant strengths in their family or community whereby advocacy and access to services mitigates some potential vulnerabilities. It is important, therefore, to individualize educational approaches in support of each child and their unique vulnerabilities and strengths. This level of intentionality includes ensuring that the specific needs of each vulnerable child are met. Partnering with families and taking the time to understand and respect family culture and context is essential to providing appropriate learning and development experiences for each child.

Sometimes, children need more services than even the most skilled and flexible educator can provide. Infant–toddler educators play an important role in early identification and connecting families to appropriate supports when they see or suspect health, developmental, or mental health challenges in a very young child. If educators identify or suspect an infant or toddler in their care has one or more of these concerns, they should collaborate with families, the appropriate service provider(s), or both to address the child’s specific needs.

Early educators should be familiar with the range of services available to help meet children’s and families’ needs. These services may include concrete supports such as food, breastfeeding support, shelter, diaper or clothing assistance, financial help, or more specialized services such as early intervention, physical health, oral health, mental health, and other services. Taking action to address suspected or identified risks may include referring the family for appropriate services or reporting concerns to a supervisor or appropriate agency as required by law. A child’s pediatrician, health clinic, or “medical home” is often an important partner and resource for children and

families; coordination with medical partners can facilitate referrals for specialty evaluations and mental health services.

Early childhood programs should be aware of and build relationships with the various community service providers that can partner with families, and early educators as appropriate, including:

- Part C Early Intervention (see <http://idea.ed.gov/part-c/search/new>)
- Developmental Pediatricians (see [www.aap.org/en-us/Pages/Default.aspx](http://www.aap.org/en-us/Pages/Default.aspx))
- Speech and Language Pathologists (see [www.asha.org/students/](http://www.asha.org/students/))
- Occupational Therapists (see [www.aota.org/practice/children-youth/early-intervention.aspx](http://www.aota.org/practice/children-youth/early-intervention.aspx))
- Physical Therapists (see [www.apta.org/apta/findapt/index.aspx?navID=10737422525](http://www.apta.org/apta/findapt/index.aspx?navID=10737422525))
- Local and County Child Welfare Agencies (see [www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionaction=rols:main\\_dspROL&rolType=Custom&RS\\_ID=56](http://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionaction=rols:main_dspROL&rolType=Custom&RS_ID=56))
- State Liaison Officers for Child Abuse and Neglect (see [www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionaction=rols:main\\_dspROL&rolType=Custom&RS\\_ID=11](http://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionaction=rols:main_dspROL&rolType=Custom&RS_ID=11))
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) State Contacts (see [www.fns.usda.gov/wic/contacts](http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/contacts))
- State Coordinators for Homeless Education (see [http://center.serve.org/nche/states/state\\_resources.php](http://center.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php))
- State Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Programs (see <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/homevisiting/states/index.html>)
- Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! A Compendium of Screening Measures for Young Children (see [www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/screening\\_compendium\\_march2014.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/screening_compendium_march2014.pdf))

### Additional Related Resource

Although infant–toddler educators would not diagnose a developmental or mental health condition in a young child, they can find useful information in ZERO TO THREE’s *Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood, Revised Edition (DC: 0–3R; 2005)*.

- Originally published in 1994 as *DC: 0–3*, it was the first developmentally based system for diagnosing mental health and developmental disorders in infants and toddlers.
- *DC: 0–3R* is in the process of being updated and revised; the new version (*DC: 0–5*), will cover disorders in children 5 years and younger. More information about the revision is available at [www.dc0-3r.org](http://www.dc0-3r.org).



## About the Considerations for Working With Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Infant-toddler educators can use the *Considerations for Working With Dual-/Multi-Language Learners* subsections to reflect on ways they can ensure a strengths-based approach to supporting dual-/multi-language learners in their early care and education programs. Although the U.S. Department of Education’s definition of “high-need children” referenced in the previous section includes dual-language learners, there is plentiful research that illustrates how learning and speaking more than one language is an asset. Some of the significant advantages of learning and speaking more than one language include higher cognitive and executive functioning, flexibility in thinking, and creativity in problem solving (Espinosa, 2014; Genesee, 2009). Children learning, speaking, and even those exposed to multiple languages on a regular basis show increased abilities to understand and think about other’s perspectives, which is a critical part of effective communication (Kuhl, 2011). One of the primary “high needs” related to young multi-language learners today may be a lack of awareness of this newer research and how to translate it into promising teaching approaches and practices. The *Considerations for Working With Dual-/Multi-Language Learners* provide some specific examples of the unique ways dual-/multi-language learners’ brains are developing and the ways their learning is different from monolingual children (Espinosa, 2014). Purposeful preparation and supports for dual-/multi-language learners can enhance relationships and connections among teachers, young children, and their families, and can increase positive language and learning opportunities and outcomes.

In some of the considerations in these subsections, there is an intentional overlap between cultural and linguistic diversity issues and supports discussed. While language and cultural diversity are not the same things, language is an important part of culture, and culture influences language learning and development. Culture helps shape the way we think and communicate.

Some of the considerations included in the subsections focused on dual-/multi-language learners highlight practices that can benefit all children. When early educators embrace and support each child’s language and culture in their programs, they increase the likelihood of positive early learning experiences. Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2012) developed six principles that can be used to enhance the foundation for reading and language outcomes for monolingual and dual-/multi-language learners. These principles, outlined in Table 2, specifically help frame the Critical Competencies’ [Area 3: Supporting Language and Literacy Development](#) and are also relevant to all of the [Critical Competencies](#).

**Table 2. Six Principles of Early Language Development**

1. Children learn what they hear most
2. Children learn words for things and events that interest them
3. Interactive and responsive environments build language learning
4. Children learn best in meaningful contexts
5. Children need to hear diverse examples of words and language structures
6. Vocabulary and grammatical development are reciprocal processes

Table 1. Source: Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2012

### Additional Related Resource

ZERO TO THREE’s [Beyond the Word Gap: Multimedia Resources and Tools](#) includes apps and interactive media, videos and podcasts, curriculum and guides, and research briefs that can help parents, professionals, and policymakers understand the importance of supporting early language and literacy and additional strategies to do so.

## Area 1: Supporting Social–Emotional Development

Social–emotional development is the foundation for all areas of childhood development and learning. For infants and toddlers, healthy social–emotional development begins with warm, positive, and responsive relationships. Relationships are important for young children’s well-being. The science of child development indicates that these relationships are also foundational to children’s learning opportunities in the early years because of how interaction with other people helps to regulate and focus a very young child’s attention and thinking on a new learning opportunity (IOM & NRC, 2015 pp. 102–103). Through satisfying and consistent relationships children play, communicate, learn, face challenges, and experience and learn to handle a full range of emotions. Starting from birth, infants are learning who they are by how they are treated. “Loving relationships provide young children a sense of comfort, safety, and confidence. Through these relational interactions with their caregivers, young children learn how to form friendships, communicate emotions, and deal with challenges. Strong, positive relationships also help children develop trust, empathy, compassion, and a sense of right and wrong.” (ZERO TO THREE, n.d.-b).



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The core knowledge and attitudes previously summarized from ZERO TO THREE’s *Cross-Sector Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age 5 Field* (see [Core Knowledge and Attitudes Summary](#)) are the foundation for the following specific competencies that can help infant–toddler educators ensure that children’s social–emotional development is optimized.

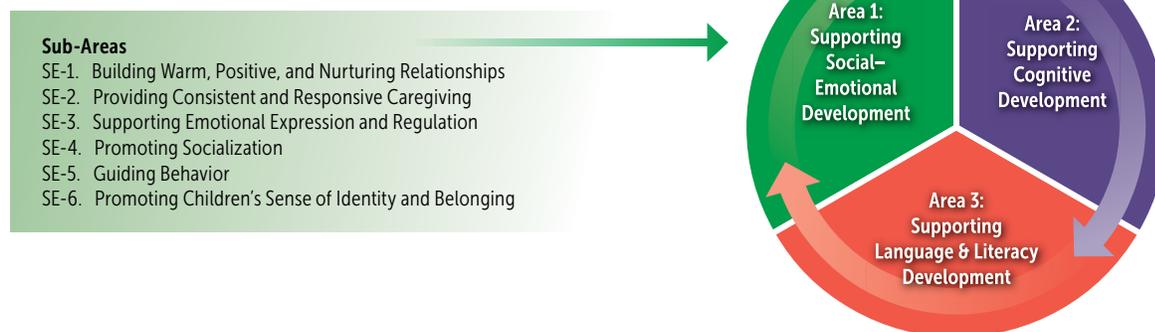
### Specifics for Infant–Toddler Educators

Early educators play an important role as part of a system of primary caregivers that includes parents, teachers, and other key adults in the child’s life. This system of primary caregivers help infants and toddlers form warm, positive, and nurturing relationships that are essential to learning. Early educators also help children learn to express and regulate emotions and socialize with peers.

Specific infant–toddler educator competencies that support **social–emotional development** and learning are presented on the following pages in six sub-areas:

- SE-1.** [Building Warm, Positive, and Nurturing Relationships](#)
- SE-2.** [Providing Consistent and Responsive Caregiving](#)
- SE-3.** [Supporting Emotional Expression and Regulation](#)
- SE-4.** [Promoting Socialization](#)
- SE-5.** [Guiding Behavior](#)
- SE-6.** [Promoting Children’s Sense of Identity and Belonging](#)

Figure 5. Area 1: Supporting Social–Emotional Development Area and Sub-Areas



**SE-1. Competencies to Support Social–Emotional Development: Building Warm, Positive, and Nurturing Relationships**

*Babies have the capacity to realize when someone is communicating something for their benefit...When adults use face-to-face contact, call a baby’s name, and point for the baby’s benefit, these signals lead babies to recognize that someone is teaching them something, and this awareness can affect how and what they learn.*

—IOM & NRC (2015), p. 97

Infant–toddler educators can support positive and nurturing relationships by demonstrating warmth and affection through frequent verbal and nonverbal affirmations as they engage with children throughout the day. Genuine positive facial expressions and tone of voice can reassure children that they have supportive relationships to rely on in their caregiving environments. Research has shown that parental warmth and positive affect are associated with infant–toddler engagement and positive affect during activity and interactions—all important social attributes that contribute to children’s overall social and emotional intelligence (Brooks-Gunn, Berlin, & Fuligni, 2000; Cox, 2003; McIntyre & Dusek, 1995). This research on parental warmth suggests a role for infant–toddler educators as well. When early educators develop warm and positive relationships with young children, they can increase children’s engagement during activities and interactions, thereby supporting children’s development of critical social skills (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2000; Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Infant–toddler educators who *build warm, positive, and nurturing relationships* with young children demonstrate the following observable skills:

- SE-1a** Convey warmth and affection toward children by smiling, laughing, and also by showing empathy when a child is sad or upset
- SE-1b** Frequently engage in nonverbal positive affirmations with children while respecting and expressing variations in affirmation across cultures (e.g., nodding, lowering voice, raising eyebrows in surprise, as appropriate and consistent with the child’s culture)
- SE-1c** Use gentle and nurturing touch to provide emotional support and to communicate affection
- SE-1d** Use children’s names during communication
- SE-1e** Make positive comments about children and their activities, for example:
  - *“Josiah, you are really working hard at placing those shapes in the sorter.”*
- SE-1f** Sit in close proximity to children depending on age
- SE-1g** Make eye contact with children when culturally appropriate and talk with them at eye level
- SE-1h** Demonstrate interest in children’s activities by joining play or commenting about children’s actions when culturally appropriate
- SE-1i** Use a tone of voice, facial expression, and level of enthusiasm that is in synch with each child’s
- SE-1j** Support children’s attempts at autonomy by promoting self-initiated exploration while remaining available to provide help when a child indicates a need for it

#### Overarching Principles: Details from the Irving Harris Foundation’s *Diversity-Informed Infant Mental Health Tenets*

**Understand That Language Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal:** Diversity-informed...practice recognizes the power of language to divide or connect, denigrate or celebrate, hurt or heal. Practitioners strive to use language (including “body language,” imagery, and other modes of nonverbal communication) in ways that most inclusively support infants and toddlers and their families, caregivers, and communities. (Irving Harris Foundation, n.d.)



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

What about infants and toddlers who may be lacking warm, positive, and nurturing relationships at home? Sometimes life events and circumstances prevent parents and guardians from offering the stable and nurturing interactions needed to help infants and toddlers develop secure and consistent relationships. When this happens, it is even more important for infant–toddler educators to provide a stable and positive relationship with very young children that augments and supports relationships with parents and guardians at home. Unfortunately when children come from inconsistent caregiving relationships at home, it is sometimes more difficult to establish secure relationships in out-of-home care settings. Children may be unresponsive to a teacher’s initial attempts at affection or may be overstimulated by positive affect. In addition, young children at risk may frequently test their teachers—such as by deliberately misbehaving—to see whether those teachers will respond consistently. In these cases it is important to offer consistent, predictable,

and positive interactions with children. Infant–toddler educators should also be sure to understand what works best for each child and tailor their interactions to match that child’s tolerance. For early educators, a critical part of supporting warm, positive, and nurturing relationships is to continue to work with parents and guardians in the home to develop consistency across settings and to support and strengthen the parent–child bond. Regardless of their home circumstances, some children with delays or disabilities may need to be explicitly taught interaction and other skills so they can participate in and build trusting relationships. Competent and skilled early educators work with family services workers, early childhood mental health providers, early intervention specialists, and others involved in supporting the family to ensure they remain aware and supportive of child–parent relationships. Over time a teacher’s consistent and contingent warmth and affection can help each child develop trusting, positive relationships.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

What about infants and toddlers who are learning more than one language? The social–emotional components of communication can be even more important as caregivers strive to build relationships with children and families who speak other languages. For example, teachers can build a bond with each child by intentionally using nonverbal communication and expressing interest in connecting with them. Nonverbal communication can be used as a support for verbal communication and includes activities such as pointing, using props, making gestures and facial expressions, demonstrating or “acting it out,” looking at and reading books with the child, showing pictures, and using sign language. Ways of expressing warmth and affection vary across cultures. While some cultures tend to use physical contact more often (e.g., hugging, kissing), other cultures tend to express positive affect from a physical distance. Teachers should keep these cultural nuances in mind as they connect with the children in their program who might be coming from diverse backgrounds. For example, some children might be accustomed to kissing and hugging everyone “hello” as they greet others when they enter a new space; however, other families might not think this

is appropriate and might prefer to wave “hello.” In partnership with families, teachers can become cultural and linguistic navigators, incorporating elements of various cultures and languages into the everyday routines, explaining how families do things or communicate similarly, but also noting some of the differences so children will be exposed to different cultural and linguistic practices. These cultural and linguistic differences provide teaching opportunities that can help children understand more about their own culture and home language, and become global citizens. As teachers develop bonds with children, they also need to engage in self-reflection to ensure that they don’t overlook a child because they are not able to share verbal language and/or experience a language and cultural match. Learning a few words or phrases from the child’s home language is helpful in forming warm and positive relationships. Educators should use children’s home languages to the maximum extent possible and be intentional about using correct pronunciations and grammar. Teachers must remember that establishing a meaningful, warm, and positive connection is the primary goal.

**What does *building warm, positive, and nurturing relationships* look like in practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Sofia, a 4-month-old, has recently entered care in Ling’s infant classroom. Ling is working to develop a relationship with Sofia by sitting close to her while she manipulates a small rattle. Ling knows that Sofia comes from a family that primarily speaks Spanish at home. As Sofia moves the rattle Ling smiles at her and says, “Sofia, wow, <i>que bonita la música que creaste con la maraca.</i>” Even though Ling’s primary language is English, she has partnered with a colleague, Marta, to learn some words in Spanish. Ling knows her ability to communicate in Spanish will help strengthen Sofia’s vocabulary and create an initial bond of trust with both her and her family. She holds eye contact with Sofia while smiling as Sofia grins back. As Sofia continues to explore the toy, Ling offers additional positive comments in Spanish about what she is doing—<i>¡qué divertido!</i>— to reassure her that she is connected to her and that what she is doing is interesting and important to Ling.</p>	<p>Jennie, a 13-month-old in Sue’s program, is playing with the cups and spoons in the toy area. Sue sits close by watching and commenting on Jennie’s play. When Jennie offers Sue a sip from her cup, Sue smiles, pretends to sip from the cup, and says, “Mmm that’s delicious!” lifting the tone of her voice with enthusiasm. Jennie smiles and runs back to the play area to fill up her cup. Sue continues to sip from Jennie’s cup and comment positively while Jennie repeats the scenario over and over until she tires of the exchange. Sue knows that Jennie is practicing this positive interaction to build social skills, and Jennie knows that she can trust Sue to respond predictably in this play routine.</p>	<p>Recently Josiah, an 18-month-old who is visually impaired, has been struggling during drop off times in Rada’s classroom. Rada, who knows Josiah’s mom has been traveling for work, understands that he needs some extra comfort in the form of verbal and physical reassurance during these transitions. When Josiah arrives in the morning, Rada makes sure that Josiah knows she is available to hold and cuddle him during this transition. She verbally assures Josiah that she is there to help him when his mom needs to leave. She keeps talking with Mom and Josiah so that when she tells Josiah that Mom is leaving, he knows to expect this physical transition. Rada hugs Josiah as he cries during Mom’s departure, reassuring him with words and gentle back rubs that Mom will be back. As Josiah’s body relaxes against Rada’s she waits until he indicates he is ready to get down and then finds a story book written in braille that they can read together. Rada made plans to be available during this transition by talking ahead of time with Joy, her co-teacher, and communicating with Josiah’s mom about their expected arrival time.</p>

## SE-2. Competencies to Support Social–Emotional Development: Providing Consistent and Responsive Caregiving

*Because early capacities to self-regulate emotion are so limited, a young child's frustration or distress can easily derail cognitive engagement in new discoveries, and children can lose focus because their attentional self-regulatory skills are comparably limited. An educator's emotional support can help keep young children focused and persistent, and can also increase the likelihood that early learning experiences will yield successful outcomes.*

—IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 103

Infant–toddler educators who are consistently sensitive to children's bids for attention and who respond to children in ways that meet their emotional, intellectual, and physical needs are teaching children to trust that when they need help they can count on others to respond. Educators who notice when children are struggling, need assistance, or want to be comforted can provide a secure base from which infants and toddlers can explore the world around them. Young children with responsive caregivers develop confidence and seek out novel experiences because they trust that the adults in their world will be there to support their exploration while ensuring their health and safety. Teachers who are consistent help infants and toddlers learn to regulate their emotions. Children can anticipate caregiver responses and the general schedule of routine events throughout the day when educators offer predictable responses and routines.

**Infant–toddler educators who provide consistent and responsive caregiving for young children demonstrate the following observable skills:**

- SE-2a** Maintain an awareness of the needs of children in the room by consistently scanning and responding when children need help
- SE-2b** Observe children's interactions and cues to understand the child's needs and responds in turn
- SE-2c** Wait for children's response to a verbal or nonverbal communication before acting and regulate responses to match or adapt those of the child
- SE-2d** Demonstrate sensitivity to children's signs of fatigue or overstimulation and adjust the pace of activities, tone of voice, and interaction style in response
- SE-2e** Accurately interpret and appropriately respond to children's attempts to disengage from an interaction or activity by ending the interaction or activity until the child is calm and attempts to re-engage
- SE-2f** Demonstrate an understanding of unique needs of children by tailoring their response or proactively planning for supports to be in tune with the individual child's preferences for receiving comfort, interaction, and support



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Sometimes infant–toddler educators need to pay special attention to children’s cues and their own responses because some children are experiencing challenging life events or a crisis outside of the group care setting. Sometimes children are slow to respond to interactions from infant–toddler teachers, or their cues may be difficult to read because of developmental delays or disabilities. Teachers can learn to read each child’s cues and wait for a response to promote participation. It is critical to understand as much as possible about the family and community within which the child resides. Children who seem to need more attention and demand to be near a primary caregiver more than usual may be communicating their need for additional

interaction and assurance to feel safe and comfortable. In these instances a teacher’s calm, predictable presence can soothe children and help them gain equilibrium when things feel chaotic in their world. On the other hand, children may also appear more withdrawn and resist teachers’ attempts to offer affection and comfort. In either instance, teachers need to rely on their understanding of each child’s individual family and community context, children’s unique temperament, play routines and interests, and favorite activities to engage children in daily activities and to reassure them that the people and activities in their group care setting remain consistent and responsive to their needs.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Children who are dual-/multi-language learners might have diverse family structures, including family members separated by immigration, extended families living in the same household, and parents that are fluent in different languages. These diverse family structures can add a layer of complexity to providing responsive caregiving in ways that are consistent with children’s home environment. For example, throughout their day, some children living with extended family might be exposed to multiple adults with varying levels of fluency in different languages. Meanwhile, some children might be experiencing long-term separation from a parent who is still living overseas, which affects the consistency of the child’s caregiving relationships. It is important to communicate with families to understand their family structure and caregiving relationships, the ways in which they show affection and support, and the language(s) spoken by the caregivers—including fluency and intensity of the languages spoken.

If there is a teacher in the early learning setting who speaks the same language as the child and family, consider the option of assigning that teacher as the primary caregiver so the child can have some consistency in their home language. Engage children in creative ways and try to mirror the nonverbal ways in which they are supported at home—whether it’s hugging, stroking their arm, or singing their favorite song. Children love to be the experts and can help others learn new words in their native language(s), and parents can help teachers navigate their cultural preferences and backgrounds. By talking with parents or guardians, teachers will learn more about what children are able to do, their preferences, and ways to engage them in learning. Infant and toddler educators can learn to use words in children’s native language(s) and promote all children’s ability to read the nonverbal cues of playmates.

### Overarching Principles: Details from the Irving Harris Foundation’s *Diversity-Informed Infant Mental Health Tenets*

**Honor Diverse Family Structures:** Families define who they are comprised of and how they are structured; no particular family constellation or organization is inherently optimal compared to any other. Diversity-informed...practice recognizes and strives to counter the historical bias toward idealizing (and conversely blaming) biological mothers as primary caregivers while overlooking the critical child-rearing contributions of other parents and caregivers including fathers, second mothers, foster parents, kin and felt family, early care and educational providers, and others. (Irving Harris Foundation, n.d.)

**What does providing consistent and responsive caregiving look like in practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Julieta, a 4-month-old in Sabina’s class-room, is enjoying playtime on the floor. Sabina positions herself on the floor next to Julieta, who is sometimes startled by the mobile infants sharing the floor space and playing nearby. When the nearby children topple a growing block tower, Sabina reassures Julieta by gently touching her back and raising her eyebrows. She says, “Wow, Julieta, that was a loud noise. Your friends knocked over their tower.” When Julieta relaxes her body against the gentle touch, Sabina lifts Julieta onto her lap. This gives Julieta a feeling of security and allows her to see what made the noise.</p>	<p>While Sabina watches Julieta’s expressions for signs of fear or uncertainty, she also keeps an eye on the tower-builders, a group of 15-month-old children, commenting on their stacking. “Ethan, how high are you going to make that tower?” “Talin, I see three levels of blocks there, just like the tower you made this morning with Jamie.” “Julieta seems interested in what you are doing.” “See Julieta, Talin and Ethan are stacking the blocks. When they fall over they make a loud noise as they hit the floor.” Sabina is responsive to the small group of children while also providing connections for Julieta so that she begins to understand the cause of the noise and feel connected to the group action.</p>	<p>When Sabina spends time with the older toddlers (24–36 months old) in the room she understands that they need a bit more autonomy but still look to her when they need reassurance. She positions herself close to the dramatic play area as two toddlers are engaged in imaginary parallel play. As the toddlers both reach for the toy tea kettle, she watches for signs of a struggle over the toy. When Jeong takes the kettle first, Ian looks to Sabina and begins to cry. Sabina responds by saying, “It looks like Jeong took the kettle you wanted to use. Is there another kettle you can use?” She watches and waits to see whether Ian moves to identify if the other kettle is available. When he continues to cry, she gently takes his hand and leads him to the toy bin, “Let’s see if we can find one in here. I think I saw another yellow kettle in this box this morning.”</p>

**SE-3. Competencies to Support Social–Emotional Development: Supporting Emotional Expression and Regulation**

*The ability to self-regulate both emotion and cognitive processes is important for learning and academic achievement, affecting children’s thinking, motivation, self-control, and social interactions. Children’s progress in this ability from birth to age 8 is influenced by the extent to which relationships with adults, learning environments, and learning experiences support this set of skills, their progress can be impaired by stressful and adverse circumstances.*

—IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 146

Infant–toddler educators support emotional expression and regulation by responding to children’s emotional cues in ways that meet children’s needs. Ensuring a generally predictable sequence of events each day and providing consistent responses to children’s bids for attention supports infants’ and toddlers’ ability to identify and regulate their emotions. Very young infants need others to provide external regulation—such as rocking, humming, turning down the lights, or offering a pacifier—so that they can begin to learn how to calm themselves. As children grow and develop they will need less external regulation and begin to develop internal regulation skills that they will hone throughout their lives. Caregivers acknowledge strong emotions—both positive and negative—and help children restore their emotional equilibrium by staying calm, modeling self-regulations skills, making suggestions, and physically assisting children with methods to manage their emotions. By helping young children learn how to handle their emotions successfully, infant–toddler educators also support children’s growing abilities to focus their attention and thinking on learning activities.

**Infant–toddler educators who support emotional expression and regulation in young children demonstrate the following observable skills:**

- SE-3a** Recognize children’s emotional cues and individualize a response based upon knowledge and understanding of individual children
- SE-3b** Support emotional regulation for younger infants by soothing them with gentle voice and touch or by redirecting their attention to elicit a more positive or calm emotional state
- SE-3c** Name or label children’s emotions to better help children recognize (and eventually talk about) their emotional states and to build a “feelings vocabulary”, for example:
- *“Tabitha, it looks like you are sad that Mom had to go to work. It’s sad when Mom leaves, I know. Remember she will be back at the end of the day to pick you up.”*
- SE-3d** Support emotional regulation for older infants and toddlers by verbally labeling and acknowledging the child’s and his peers’ emotional states (both positive and negative); provide assistance (verbal and nonverbal) and model strategies for appropriately expressing and managing emotions, for example:
- *“Joshua, it looks like you are getting frustrated with that puzzle piece. Sometimes when I get frustrated I take a deep breath or two until I feel better. Let’s take a deep breath and then I can help you try again if you like.”*
- SE-3e** Follow a predictable schedule of daily activities so that children can anticipate (in a general way) what will happen at different times of the day
- SE-3f** Individualize children’s routines and activities in response to their developmental levels and needs
- SE-3g** Prepare children for times of day or transitions that may be stressful by providing verbal and nonverbal support to help children manage emotions, for example:
- *“Antonio, in just a few minutes it will be time to go inside for lunch. I am going to start picking up some of our sand toys and putting them in this bucket, would you like to help me?” Sarah says as she holds out her hand to Antonio.*



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

When infants and toddlers in the early education setting experience at-risk environments such as maternal depression or domestic violence, a caregiver's support of their emotional expression and regulation requires "a thoughtful appreciation of how strategies of emotional regulation are forged in circumstances of risk" (Thompson & Calkins, 1996, p. 18). For such children, "emotional regulation often entails inherent trade-offs that make non-optimal strategies of managing emotion expectable, perhaps inevitable, in a context of difficult environmental demands and conflicting emotional goals" (p. 1). This means that behaviors and levels of emotional expression that are used at home, where parental depression and/or domestic violence may be present, may be less understood or less functional in the early education setting. For instance, a child who has learned at home that her needs will be attended to only when she expresses those needs intensely may find that doing so in an early education setting causes caregivers to be annoyed and nonresponsive. On the other hand, dysregulation could be an indication the child has a physical health issue or developmental delay, which might be mitigated with the assistance of an occupational therapist.

Infant–toddler educators need to understand and consider a wide array of contextual factors when supporting emotional expression and regulation. Such behavior may make children vulnerable in a setting where such expression or regulation results in negative consequences for a child. For instance, when infants and toddlers of depressed mothers experience negative or absent responses to their emotional expression, they may learn to mute those expressions and may appear flat and unresponsive themselves in the early childhood setting. Alternately, extreme emotions may be the only way an infant or toddler receives a response to an emotional cue and thus quickly use more intense emotional expression when they need to signal a caregiver. It is important to understand that what appears to be atypical emotional expression or dysregulation may actually be functional or adaptive in the child's home setting. Infant–toddler educators should enlist family members and infant mental health consultants to determine the best approach to support children's efforts at emotional expression and regulation when typical attempts to model and support these behaviors are not effective.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Infant–toddler educators should consider that the ways of expressing and managing emotions, including emotional regulation, have significant cultural variability. Educators can connect with families to learn about their expectations and to understand how their child communicates specific needs, wants, and emotions (e.g., "hungry," "sleepy," "diaper," "more food"). Educators need to understand how parents help their children process these feelings and the names for feelings in the child's home language. Given that people tend to be more emotional in their first language or use their native language as

they experience stronger emotions,

*sometimes these needs, wants, and feelings may be expressed in the child's home language. Because this may be a language that caregivers don't know, families can meet with providers to share the words children usually use to communicate at home. [Infant–toddler educators are] encouraged to learn this vocabulary themselves in order to recognize the words more easily when children use them. (ZERO TO THREE, 2008, p. 52)*

**What does *supporting emotional expression and regulation* look like in practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Elijah is an 8-month-old in Vinh’s child care program. Upon waking, Elijah communicates his emotional state by crying softly at first and then with increased intensity as he becomes fully awake. When Elijah first wakes, Vinh is changing the diaper of another child in her care. As she hears Elijah’s initial cries, she responds by saying, “I hear that you are awake Elijah, I will be there soon.” Vinh knows that she can finish her care of one child while reassuring Elijah. As Vinh finishes the diaper change and transitions that child to another caregiver, Elijah’s emotional cues will likely increase in intensity. Again, Vinh matches her response with a physical one, moving to pick Elijah up and soothe him as she says, “You are ready to get up.” “Did you have a good rest?” “I am so happy you are awake now, would you like to get up and out of your crib?” as she picks Elijah up and transitions to the next activity.</p>	<p>Adan is a 10-month-old who has just begun to crawl and explore the play area in Gabi’s infant–toddler classroom. Gabi has noticed that he is easily frustrated by some of the toys in the area, including the pop-beads and connecting blocks. He can pull them apart but cannot easily get them back together. As Adan moves toward the bin of pop-beads, Gabi positions herself next to him to help him explore the beads and put them back together if he needs assistance. When Adan begins to struggle, she asks him, “Adan, can I help you?” When Adan looks at her and lifts the beads toward her, Gabi helps him by holding one bead still so he can more easily connect another bead to it, saying, “These can be hard to reconnect. Sometimes we need help.” She makes sure to offer him other toys, such as the pop-up toy which he has mastered, when he becomes overwhelmed by the challenging beads or tires of her help.</p>	<p>Katie is a 24-month-old in Gabi’s classroom who has been identified as being on the mild range in the autism spectrum. As Katie begins to snuggle a soft blanket in the dramatic play area, Gabi notices that it is just about the time of day when Katie takes her nap. To cue this transition for Katie, Gabi bends down to Katie’s eye level and shows Katie the picture card of her nap cot; in collaboration with Katie’s family and her early intervention specialist, Gabi created multiple picture cards to help communicate with and support Katie throughout her day. Gabi also makes the sign for “naptime” and verbally comments on Katie’s actions, “Katie it looks like you are getting tired. It’s almost time for your nap.” Gabi knows that consistent routines can help Katie and all of her toddler peers feel safe and secure. She also knows it’s important to be consistent in using the multiple methods of communication Katie’s family and early intervention specialist use with Katie. Gabi suggests, “Let’s get your blanket from your cubbie, Katie,” as she holds out her hand. Katie shifts and keeps her gaze on Gabi’s hands, then remains still in the dramatic play area. After a few moments, Gabi repeats her suggestion verbally, makes the signs for blanket and nap, and gently guides Katie toward her cubbie. Katie walks with Gabi to her cubbie and together they get her blanket and continue the transition to nap time.</p>

### SE-4. Competencies to Support Social–Emotional Development: Promoting Socialization

The earliest attempts at socialization happen in infancy when children interact with caring and responsive adults who model healthy social relationships and respond to their initial attempts to interact with and engage others. In fact, children are born wired to be social, interactive beings—so the adults' responses to infants' and toddlers' social cues, which create back-and-forth social communication and reciprocity, help to enhance children's earliest social experiences with other adults and children. When caregivers are attuned to babies' emerging attempts at socialization, read an infant's cues accurately, and respond to a child's social overtures in turn and in synch with a young child's social behaviors, infants learn the art of connecting with a consistent caregiver. As older toddlers move toward parallel and cooperative play, caregivers can support the development of empathy as toddlers begin to learn that others have feelings, experiences, and perspectives that are different from their own. The social expectations created in child–caregiver interactions become applied to the child's encounters with others: a confident expectation that the other person will be fun to be with, or uncertainty or distrust that one's initiatives will receive a positive response. These social expectations become what attachment theorists have labeled "internal working models" and play a large role in shaping the way children approach and navigate social relationships.

*The development of positive relationships enables young children to participate constructively in learning experiences that are inherently social. The emotional support and security provided by positive relationships contributes in multifaceted ways to young children's learning success.*

—IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 141

**Infant–toddler educators who promote socialization in young children demonstrate the following observable skills:**

- SE-4a** Respond to social signals from children and individualize a response based upon knowledge and understanding of individual children
- SE-4b** Interact with children in a variety of ways (e.g., verbal and physical redirection) to support children's socialization and development
- SE-4c** Use the environment to support positive and developmentally appropriate social interactions. For example, making spaces for infants to lie next to one another or for toddlers to sit near one another
- SE-4d** Place babies so they can see and reach things and observe and respond to the interactions and activities occurring around them
- SE-4e** Use knowledge of children's shared interests and temperaments to facilitate play among peers
- SE-4f** Support self-regulation and socialization during peer play by commenting and supporting children's emerging cooperative skills, for example: "Timothy, you are offering Chloe a baby doll to use. It looks like you want her to play with you in the housekeeping area? Maybe you can take your babies for a walk in the strollers there."
- SE-4g** Guide children to use developmentally appropriate and prosocial cues as needed, for example encouraging the use of words rather than hitting to indicate ownership of a toy during peer play
- SE-4h** Modify routines, interactions, and activities in response to children's needs while maintaining a generally predictable daily schedule



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Socialization and cooperation are skills learned through responses to children's social cues in the form of back-and-forth interactions to foster circles of social communication and reciprocity. It is important not to generalize or assume that all vulnerable children live in homes with limited opportunities for socialization. When a child does live in a home with limited opportunities for socialization, because his family is experiencing isolation or because the adults in the home do not include children in socialization, it can influence how that child approaches his social interactions in the caregiving setting. Supporting socialization and play with peers for children who are considered vulnerable because of their exposure to highly intense or chronic stress is particularly important. "One of the reasons these children experience social difficulties, such as peer conflict or poor

compliance with teachers, is that the biological effects of stress enhance their emotional reactivity, heighten their threat vigilance, and undermine their emotion regulation and impulse control" (IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 74). Helping children practice the self-regulation and impulse control—by providing opportunities for regulation and self-soothing and for regular peer interaction with sensitive and individualized adult facilitation—can be beneficial for some vulnerable children cared for in infant–toddler group settings. Infant–toddler educators should communicate with families and infant mental health consultants to guide their supports for children who may need specific one-on-one supports or environmental adaptations to be successful in peer socialization.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Researchers adopting a sociocultural approach to child development have enhanced the understanding of how language, learning, and culture are connected and affect the socialization process (e.g., Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Gutiérrez, Zepeda, & Castro, 2010; McCabe et al., 2014; Rogoff, 2003; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Despite the expectation that parents and family members should assume the driver's role in their children's native language socialization, dual-/multi-language learners will benefit from early learning curricula that meaningfully incorporate home language and cultural competence. Not only will this inclusion help children learn multiple languages, but they will simultaneously learn to socialize trans- and cross-culturally. As young children learn to socialize, they learn the language of the culture they are born into, including what is expected of them. They also learn and usually adopt the norms or conceptions of appropriate and expected behavior. In an early education setting, children might learn norms that are similar to those they have learned at home. However, in some instances,

norms can be different—or even contradictory. Even seemingly trivial expectations, such as asking children to feed themselves, can have major impacts on the socialization of children in their home culture. While some cultures value independence and will promote self-care activities to emerge early on, in this case self-feeding, other cultures value interdependence and will promote waiting for self-care activities to emerge later on in life. Children need to learn the "rules" and norms of their setting in order to be able to respond accordingly and this process can take time, especially if the norms are very different from those at home. Infant–toddler educators can use their knowledge of children's family and cultural values, interests, and preferences to promote socialization as well as facilitate play among peers. Teachers can act as "cultural and linguistic liaisons" and help playmates understand where a child is coming from. For example, scaffolding play between children who are able to speak the dominant language and those who are not can help children develop a sense of belonging and promote socialization.

**What does *promoting socialization* look like in practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Tomas, a 6-month-old, is carefully following Mei's lead in a game of peek-a-boo. Tomas maintains eye contact with Mei and as she places her hands in front of her face, he stays focused on her until she opens her hands and says, "Peek-a-boo, I see you!" Tomas laughs excitedly and Mei repeats the game several times. On the fourth time, Mei notices that Tomas is looking away when she opens her hands and is watching the children play on the floor. Rather than continue with the peek-a-boo game, Mei asks Tomas, "Do you see Shannon and Jimmy playing with the cars, Tomas?" Mei knows that when Tomas looks away during an exciting game like peek-a-boo he is probably ready for a break from that much stimulation. She responds in a way that supports Tomas's need to redirect his attention from the stimulating interaction and to focus on his peers' play.</p>	<p>Lola, a 13-month-old in Isabel's program is intently watching Claire work on a wooden puzzle. As Lola stares at Claire, Isabel comments, "It looks like you are interested in Claire's puzzle. Would you like a puzzle of your own to use?" Before Isabel can intervene, Lola grabs for Claire's puzzle resulting in a tug-of-war between the two children. Isabel gently places her hands on Lola's to guide her to release the puzzle. "I am going to help you give this puzzle back to Claire because she was using it." When Lola begins to cry, Isabel says, "It looks like you're frustrated because you want that puzzle. Claire is using that one, but we can find you one of your own to use." She picks Lola up to comfort her, and walks to the basket of puzzles to help Lola choose one to use. Isabel sits with Lola as she begins to use the puzzle and reassures her until she can see that Lola has calmed down and is engaged with the new puzzle.</p>	<p>Felix is an 18-month-old who occasionally bites in frustration when others get too close or try to use a toy he is playing with. During free play time his teacher, Zoe, positions herself on the floor near Felix and another child who are playing with the dump trucks. John, Felix's playmate, is watching Felix use his dump truck and begins to reach for it. Felix instinctively opens his mouth to place it on John's hand. Zoe stops Felix from biting John and says, "Felix, tell John you are using that truck right now." Say, "Stop John, I'm using the truck." When Felix repeats Zoe's phrase, Zoe smiles and says, "Felix, you used words to tell John to stop. That's the way we tell people that we don't like what they are doing and to stop. Biting only hurts John and doesn't tell him what you want him to do." As these toddlers mature, Zoe can begin to guide them in more complex forms of conflict resolution that offer children a chance to suggest solutions to the problem at hand. For example, with more verbal toddlers, Zoe might say, "Hmm, John, it looks like Felix is using that truck right now, and you want to use the same truck. I wonder how we could solve that problem. Do you have any ideas?"</p>

## SE-5. Competencies to Support Social–Emotional Development: Guiding Behavior

The learning that occurs in the infant–toddler years includes educators' purposeful guiding of children's behavior. As young children explore their environment, including early interaction with peers, guidance about how to manage their own behavior is crucial. Early educators actively minimize behavior challenges by carefully constructing the learning environment, providing multiples of favorite play materials, positioning themselves in close proximity to pairs or small groups of children, and ensuring that there are many opportunities to play with engaging materials throughout the early learning setting. In addition to activity and environmental planning, early educators model appropriate behavior, provide physical redirection when needed, offer positive reinforcement for children's early successes at managing their impulses (e.g., using the word "no" or "wait" when a peer grabs a play toy rather than hitting or biting in response), and provide children with simple messages about what behavior is expected. By focusing behavior guidance on what is expected, early educators provide children the information they need to behave appropriately (e.g., "Please sit on your bottom when you come down the slide") rather than simply telling children what is not acceptable (e.g., "Don't stand on the slide" or "If you stand on the slide you will be all done"). Skillful educators provide simple and clear messages about behavioral expectations, while also redirecting children from inappropriate behaviors.

*Commonplace interactions provide contexts for supporting the development of cognitive and learning skills and the emotional security in which early learning thrives... talking about a sibling's temper tantrum or an episode of classroom peer conflict—these and other shared experiences contribute to young children's cognitive development and early learning.*

—IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 152

### Infant–toddler educators who *guide the behavior* of young children demonstrate the following observable skills:

- SE-5a** Proactively support children's positive behavior by setting up conditions that minimize the potential for misbehavior, such as encouraging specific on-task behavior, offering a variety of play options, positioning to provide support, and providing multiples of favorite play materials, for example:
  - "I'm noticing that Shelley is only using some of the pop-beads so Matt and Fran can have some to play with too."
- SE-5b** Redirect children's inappropriate behavior by offering different choices to diffuse minor conflicts and manage extreme emotions, for example, deep breathing, blowing bubbles, holding a favorite object, snuggling, or listening to relaxing music
- SE-5c** Model appropriate behaviors for children
- SE-5d** Establish and remind children of limits by providing positively phrased single-step directions, for example:
  - "Sonja, please walk down the hall" (rather than "Don't run") or "Remember, we sit on our chairs when we eat"
- SE-5e** Use anticipatory talk to prepare children for transitions, for example:
  - "After I wash my hands, Sally, let's check your diaper." Or with older infants and toddlers, "In 5 more minutes we will clean up and get ready for lunch." or "After we sing our good-morning song, we will have play time when you can choose an activity."

Infant–toddler educators who *guide the behavior* of young children demonstrate the following observable skills (contd.):

**SE-5f** Set consistent limits and explain them concretely to help children begin to understand the reasons behind them, for example:

- *“Marcus, let’s find the soft balls to throw into the basket. If you throw the hard wooden blocks and miss the basket you might hurt someone nearby.”*

**SE-5g** Provide and frame genuine choices for children, for example:

- *“Ashley is using the blocks right now, would you like to play with the balls or the pop-beads?”*
- *Avoid false choices like, “Are you going to share your trucks?” Or, “Do you want to take a nap?”*

**SE-5h** Support children making choices by limiting the number of choices, providing enough time for children to respond, and allowing children to change their minds before making a final choice

**SE-5i** Comment positively about children’s choices, for example:

- *“Stephan, I noticed that you stepped to the side to make room for Kayla at the sand area. That’s very thoughtful. Thank you.”*



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Early education settings offer valuable opportunities for guiding children’s behavior and helping them to learn things like impulse control, shared perspective, and empathy. When very young children are exposed to chronic stress due to poverty, abuse or neglect, homelessness, or other conditions, it can influence their development and ability to manage behavioral limits. Exposure to chronic stress can manifest in children as “poorer impulse control, more difficulty focusing their attention and thinking, and more trouble controlling their emotions,” (Thompson & Haskins, 2014). Early educators can act as a buffer for chronic stress with consistent and predictable support to children as they attempt to regulate their own behavior. This support may be verbal or nonverbal as children learn what is acceptable and how to control impulses or manage strong emotions. For example, infant–toddler educators may position themselves close to peer interactions to observe and anticipate individualized supports when the caregivers’ knowledge of the child indicates that this type of play may trigger aggression or other misbehavior. Without

positive models for conflict resolution, children may not have a clear understanding of what behavior is acceptable when things go wrong. Noticing children who are on-task and acknowledging appropriate behavior is key to helping all children understand what is expected of them and when they are meeting those expectations. Working with families across the home–school continuum, infant–toddler educators can share successes and encourage families to try similar strategies at home. If children’s challenging behavior is atypical and consistent across multiple contexts, then teachers should consult with early intervention professionals or an early childhood mental health consultant to ensure that children’s needs are being addressed in the group setting. Some young children will need specific instructional guidance to learn how and when to regulate their emotions. Due to delays in learning, they may not be able to learn from observing the examples of other children or teachers and may need opportunities to practice in structured settings using systematic supports.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Rules and norms are culturally bound and appropriate depending on the context. Not understanding the cultural norms of a setting can lead to children inadvertently “breaking the rules.” As infant–toddler educators work to guide the behaviors of children who are learning multiple languages, it is important to remember that communication is a process in which meaning is shared between two or more people. A child who might not be familiar with the language or cultural nuances of the learning environment might experience challenges in communication. Guiding behavior is culturally nuanced, and how the child is supported and redirected is influenced by value systems and culture. For example, some children might not be used to negotiating and might readily accept terms because their culture has reinforced the values of authority and respecting their elders. In addition, in multilingual homes, infants can recognize and organize the sounds of two or more languages if their parents speak multiple languages, tuning in to the languages most familiar to them and paying less attention to the sounds of unfamiliar languages (Brandt, Gebrian, & Slevc, 2012; Swingley, 2009). Children who speak other languages

might appear to be socially withdrawn or unresponsive to attempts to guide behavior, but it is important to remember that these children may not understand the behavioral norms or expectations when they are not communicated in their home language. Consistent routines help children understand what to expect, not just through language but through consistency that helps children anticipate what will be happening next. For this population of children, modeling appropriate behaviors and sharing choices in the child’s home language can help reduce misunderstandings. Infant–toddler educators can reinforce their messages to bilingual children by using words and accompanying them with a gesture, action, or facial expression to solidify what they are trying to convey. Educators can also be intentional about pairing bilingual/multilingual toddlers who share the same home language so they can help each other with language comprehension; toddlers who are more advanced bilingually can help others with less English understand classroom routines and expectations.

### Overarching Principles: Details from the Irving Harris Foundation’s *Diversity-Informed Infant Mental Health Tenets*

**Work to Acknowledge Privilege and Combat Discrimination:** Discriminatory policies and practices that harm adults harm the infants in their care. Privilege constitutes injustice. Diversity-informed ... professionals work to acknowledge privilege and to combat racism, classism, sexism, able-ism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other systems of oppression within themselves, their practices, and their fields.

**What does *guiding behavior* look like in practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>As Michel reads Rita’s daily chart he notices that she is due for a diaper change. To prepare Rita, a 6-month-old who is actively playing with the pop-up toy which makes animal sounds, he lets her know that a transition is coming soon. “After I wash my hands, Rita, let’s check your diaper,” he says. Rita looks up and makes eye contact and Michel smiles, “I am going to wash my hands now, and then I will come over to check your diaper.” Rita looks back to her toy and continues playing. When Michel emerges to get her for a diaper check he reminds her, “Rita, I am done washing my hands, so let’s check that diaper. We can put the toy right up here on the shelf so it will be waiting for you when we are done.”</p>	<p>Jessica noticed Mia’s interest in the animal noises pop-up toy and also saw that other children look for that toy regularly. Mia, a 10-month-old, understandably had a hard time sharing the toy. To avoid conflict over a toy and promote developmentally appropriate exploration of cause and effect with the toy, Jessica puts other cause and effect toys in the same area so that there are multiple options for this type of play. In addition, she positions herself close to these toys so that she can gently guide the group by commenting on the availability of other, similar toys and to begin to talk about the need for everyone in the group to have a chance to play with these toys. This helps to avoid potential conflicts as the more mobile infants have begun to take toys away from their peers who are less mobile.</p>	<p>Several toddlers in Susan’s class have begun to attempt to walk down the playground’s small plastic slide to challenge themselves. Susan explains to 22-month-old Alison, that she needs to sit to go down the slide. “Alison, I want you to sit on your bottom to go down the slide because you might fall if you try to walk down it on your feet.” In addition, Susan notes that Alison is really enjoying climbing and redirects her to the tree stumps of varying heights that offer a safer way for Alison to practice her skills. Susan also makes a mental note to bring out the step climber and the small wooden ramp later that afternoon so that Alison has another safe option to practice her newly emerging climbing skills.</p>

**SE-6. Competencies to Support Social–Emotional Development: Promoting Children’s Sense of Identity and Belonging**

*Interactions with teachers and peers in the classroom provide young children with apt lessons in mutual understanding and perspective taking, cooperation, conflict management, personality differences and similarities, and emotional understanding in an environment where these skills are developing.*

—IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 147

Infants and toddlers in group care need to develop relationships with the consistent group of adults and children with whom they spend their days. Forming positive relationships with others helps promote children’s sense of identity and belonging and, as children mature, supports mutual understanding and shared perspective. Helping very young children develop a basic sense of community—those people who make up their system of primary caregivers as well as their peers—promotes a sense of consistency, trust, and predictability that reinforces all aspects of social–emotional development. As children feel safe and included in a group setting, they develop a sense of personal value and identity, as well as acceptance of self and of others as part of a diverse community. These experiences build children’s self-esteem, sense of worth, and understanding of similarities and differences among community members—all of which help ready children for positive social learning opportunities.

Infant–toddler educators who *promote children’s sense of identity and belonging* demonstrate the following observable skills:

- SE-6a** Provide individual space for children’s belongings if possible. For example, in smaller environments, using child-safe hooks to hold children’s belongings can be a space-sensitive approach that still delineates a specific area that “belongs” to each child
- SE-6b** Allow for personalized comfort items unique to each child (e.g., a special blanket or teddy bear)
- SE-6c** Provide visual, auditory, or other representations of children’s families within the group care setting
- SE-6d** Provide culturally and linguistically diverse visual, auditory, or other representations in the group care setting to build an understanding of diversity within and outside of the group care community
- SE-6e** Greet children and families in a way that is respectful of family preferences and abilities as they arrive (e.g., with a “hello” and a smile, with a hug and a comment about being happy to see them or a question about how their previous evening or morning has been) and invite them to join in the activities of the classroom or home-based care setting
- SE-6f** Comment on children’s arrival and departure from the group care setting
- SE-6g** Promote children’s engagement with other children upon arrival and throughout the day so that children begin to seek out peers within the group setting as a source of comfort, enjoyment, and support with simple tasks and activities
- SE-6h** Provide pictures of children throughout the group care setting so that children can see images of themselves



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

All children need a sense of belonging and to feel that they are loved and accepted into a community. For children from vulnerable populations, who often experience multiple transitions in housing or other life events, belonging to a community of peers can act as a buffer to the instability of multiple transitions. Ensuring that these children feel part of the community and that they have consistent primary caregivers and consistent playmates can be reassuring experiences. Photographs of children’s homes may not be available,

especially if children experience homelessness or have limited resources to take and print photographs. Infant–toddler educators can take photographs of children in their early learning environment with their families, peers, and caregivers to include in displays. Sharing diverse images of children, including some wearing glasses, hearing aids or cochlear implants, or with varying facial features, weights, and heights can also be important to establishing a culture of acceptance.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Language is closely tied with cultural pride and identity. Honoring a child’s and family’s primary and/or heritage language helps boost their self-esteem and feel connected with family. Some families may worry that if their children are exposed to English in a child care setting they may lose their home language. This is not necessarily the case. Connecting with children in a familiar language is ideal as infant–toddler educators strive to help children master concepts and develop proficiency in a second language. Research has shown that the number of words learned in each language is, to a large extent, proportional to the amount of time spent with caregivers who speak the language (Pearson, Fernández, Lewedeg & Oller, 1997). This research underscores the importance of supporting families’ consistent use of home language to support their child’s bilingualism and cultural identity. When providers create an environment that is open and welcoming to families who use languages other than English, children and families receive the message that their home

language is good, important, and respected. The ability to use one’s home language in the early education setting—and having this skill be welcomed and supported by providers—helps children develop confidence, self-esteem, and a positive cultural identity. Providers can also show respect for families’ home cultures by incorporating foods, songs, stories, and objects that reflect children’s home cultures into early learning and caregiving programs. Teachers and caregivers can look for ways to incorporate aspects of children’s cultures into daily routines; children become more interested in the learning process because the activities look familiar to them. Teachers can sing the morning song in English as well as another language to start the day off on an inclusive beat. Recognizing and celebrating holidays from the family’s home culture(s) creates a welcoming and inclusive setting as well. Offering written information in languages other than English is another important way to reach out to culturally diverse families.

### What does promoting children’s sense of identity and belonging look like In practice?

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Jacob has observed 6-month-old Alice staring at her reflection in the floor-level mirror in their infant–toddler classroom. In fact, several infants have been at the mirror lately and he wonders about other places in the classroom where young infants can see reflections of their physical attributes, those of their peers, and those not reflected in the classroom community. Jacob talks with his co-teachers about working with families to laminate photos of family members and others from the community of various races, ethnicities, abilities, and ages to create books and laminated cards for the infants to explore. The teacher invites families to join them in this activity—a practice that both adds diverse materials to the classroom and sends the message to families that diversity and inclusion are valued and celebrated in their classroom community.</p>	<p>Lately Madelyn, a 15-month-old in Isabella’s family child care, has been asking to read the book <i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear</i> repeatedly. Isabella knows that Madelyn likes the predictability of the book’s language and decides to use the children’s names in the same sing-song pattern, “Madelyn, Madelyn, who do you see?” “I see Isabella looking at me...” and she repeats this using each child who is present that day in her extension of the story. Madelyn and the other children are so excited to hear their name in the familiar book that Isabella decides to create a homemade version of the book, using pictures of the children, families, and caregivers for each page and using the language she adapted for their group. This allows children to follow along and predict which child will be next in the story by looking at the photos of their peers. The children also regularly see their family child care community represented in this favorite book.</p>	<p>Lucas, an 18-month-old in Jacob’s classroom, has been struggling with drop off in the morning. In recent days Jacob has made sure to be available when Lucas arrived in the morning and that has helped, but Jacob is still having a difficult time managing the transition. Jacob enlists Lucas’ family in developing a family book with pictures of his home, his mom, dad, sister, and grandmother as well as the food market that Lucas and his family pass through when they come to school and go back home. Lucas’ mom also shares a picture of the school she goes to and dad brings in a photo of the construction vehicles at his work site. These photos help Lucas see where Mom and Dad are when he is at his school. This family book is kept in Lucas’ personal cubbie for his use throughout the day and whenever he is missing his family.</p>

## Area 2: Supporting Cognitive Development

Supporting infant and toddler cognitive development requires educators to have a solid understanding of the infant–toddler developmental continuum, individual children’s interests and temperament, and the way in which cognitive learning is scaffolded—coached or supported by a more experienced peer or a caregiver—through responsive facilitation of play and exploration. “When adults understand how the mind develops, what progress children make in their cognitive abilities, and how active inquiry and learning are children’s natural inclination, they can foster cognitive growth by supporting children’s active engagement with new experiences” (IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 101). When this knowledge is coupled with responsive and nurturing facilitation by a trusted teacher, infants and toddlers



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are able to focus their energy on exploration, creativity, and growth; a safe and secure relationship helps infant–toddler learning and development be maximized. Infant and toddler educators who support cognitive development are helping to lay the foundation for more discrete numeracy and science concepts learned in the preschool years. Infant and toddler cognition includes understanding basic foundational scientific and mathematic concepts such as discovering how a pop-up toy works or listening and observing to see and hear what happens when they move a rattle. As young infants mature they can rely upon their developing memory to help them make sense of the world. Infant–toddler teachers encourage, facilitate, and comment upon these early experiences to help young children begin to understand basic mathematical, spatial, and causal relationships.

The core knowledge and attitudes previously summarized from ZERO TO THREE’s *Cross-Sector Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age 5 Field* (see [Core Knowledge and Attitudes Summary](#)) are the foundation for the following specific competencies that can help infant–toddler educators ensure that children’s social–emotional development is optimized.

### Specifics for Infant–Toddler Educators

Infant–toddler educators are central to young children’s cognitive development because they provide the consistent and supportive relationships in which exploration and understanding of concepts are nurtured. Within consistent relationships infants and toddlers seek out experiences and interactions that spark their curiosity and wonder about the world. Supportive educators build on the natural inquisitiveness of infants and toddlers to purposefully plan for and support extended engagement with and increased understanding of basic foundational concepts. Cognitive growth is stimulated by infant–toddler educators’ ability to observe and follow children’s natural inclinations to learn about their world and to build on such teachable moments.

Specific infant–toddler educator competencies that support **cognitive development** are presented in four sub-areas:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>C-1.</b> <a href="#">Facilitating Exploration and Concept Development</a> | <b>C-3.</b> <a href="#">Promoting Imitation, Symbolic Representation, and Play</a> |
| <b>C-2.</b> <a href="#">Building Meaningful Curriculum</a>                   | <b>C-4.</b> <a href="#">Supporting Reasoning and Problem Solving</a>               |

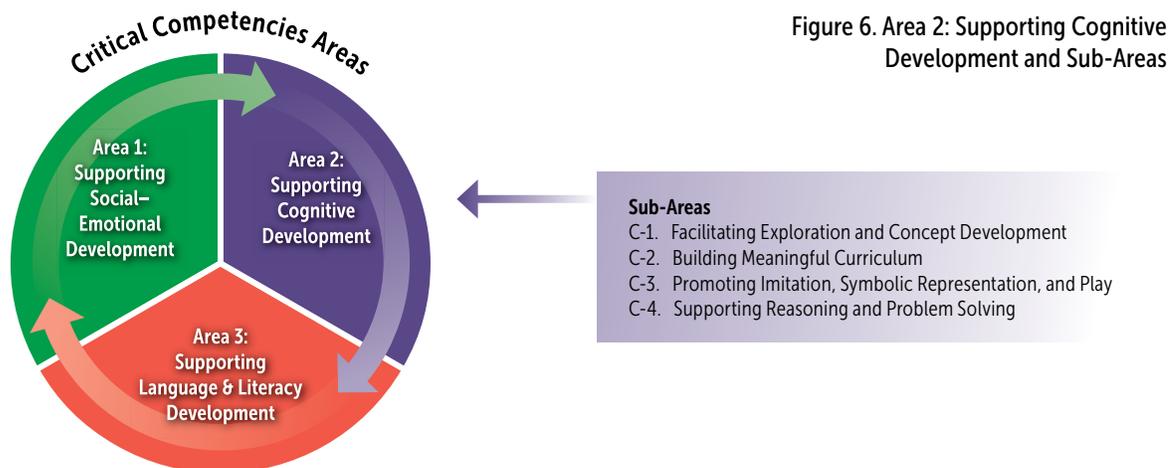


Figure 6. Area 2: Supporting Cognitive Development and Sub-Areas

### C-1. Competencies to Support Cognitive Development: Facilitating Exploration and Concept Development

*Using an abundance of child-directed language during social interaction, playing counting games (while stacking blocks), putting into words what a classroom pet can do or why somebody looks sad, exploring together what happens when objects collide, engaging in imitative play and categorization (sorting) games—these and other shared activities can be cognitively provocative as long as they remain within the young child’s capacities for interest and attention.*

—IOM & NRC (2015), p. 102

Infant–toddler educators have a critical role to play in supporting infant and toddler exploration of objects and experiences that promote an understanding of the way the world works. As a trusted and consistent adult in a young child’s life, an infant–toddler educator provides a secure relationship. Within this secure relationship infants and toddlers may test assumptions about the way things work and experiment with using familiar items for new purposes. Infants’ and toddlers’ understandings about basic concepts like shapes and sizes, feelings, and body movement in space can also be enhanced. It is through the skillful facilitation of play and exploration that an infant–toddler educator both extends children’s interest in

objects and activities and sets the stage for children to develop more complex understandings of concepts in line with their developmental stage. Infant–toddler educators participate in the child’s play, ask thought-provoking questions, set up challenging scenarios, and act intentionally to enhance children’s understanding of concepts. This is not a simple task. Knowing when and how to extend a child’s engagement toward the development of a more complex understanding requires educators to respond to a child’s growing interest and skill, while also remaining mindful of overtaxing or frustrating that same child. Infant–toddler educators need to draw upon their knowledge of individual children’s interests, temperaments, culture and language, and physical needs to ensure that they are providing access to objects and experiences that challenge children’s skills and understanding, while allowing for success that will reinforce children’s desire to repeat such exploration in the future.

**Infant–toddler educators who facilitate children’s exploration and concept development demonstrate the following observable skills:**

- C-1a** Ensure that different types of culturally appropriate toys or other objects are present and accessible in the group care setting so that infants and toddlers can explore objects and their functionality
- C-1b** Position infants to promote independent exploration of objects, their own hands and feet, or a caregiver’s face
- C-1c** Promote infants’ exploration using their senses—hearing, touching and feeling different textures, seeing, smelling, or tasting
- C-1d** Extend infants’ exploration of objects by repositioning infants or objects, imitating actions, and modeling varied ways to use objects
- C-1e** Expand children’s exploration by describing and pointing out attributes or properties of living and nonliving things (e.g., textures, size, shape, or function) for example: Helping infants to cover their eyes and discover what can and cannot be perceived; helping a young toddler understand that a broken bone can heal but a broken toy cannot
- C-1f** Join children’s play and activities, participating in response to children’s requests or cues (both verbal and nonverbal) without overly directing the play and with the goal of extending children’s interest and deepening their explorations
- C-1g** Demonstrate both functional and novel ways to use or move objects and toys; use descriptive language to provide explanation and reasoning for why an action occurred (“You pushed the ball and it knocked down the tower”) or how objects can be used in new ways (“What would happen if...”)
- C-1h** Facilitate children’s exploration of concepts like means–end and cause and effect by prompting through processes and offering specific verbal and nonverbal information or guidance when children need additional cues to understand concepts, for example:
- *Helping toddlers investigate how mud is formed when it rains or which things sink or float by asking, “I wonder whether the feather (or rock, or container) will sink or float?”*
  - *Exploring cause and effect with infants by commenting, “When you move your hand this way, the toy makes a chica, chica sound”*
  - *Exploring object permanence with an older infant, who drops a spoon by asking, “Where did the spoon go? Can you see it?”*
  - *Helping a mobile infant to search for hidden or missing people or objects in the place they were last seen or found*
- C-1i** Provide linguistically appropriate labels for attributes and concepts that children encounter to build their understanding of basic concepts such as color, shape, sound, size, letters, numbers, and feelings. For example:
- *Label groups of things as more or less and add numerical values to sets of items, “Tonya, you have four balls in your bucket and Samuel, you have two in yours. Tonya has more balls in her bucket, four is more than two.”*
- C-1j** Use spatial/conceptual terms such as up/down, on/off, in/out, while modeling the action physically, for example: “You are at the TOP of the slide.”



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Facilitating exploration and concept development is important for all children but especially critical for children who may not have opportunities to safely explore small manipulatives, cause and effect toys, or other learning materials in their homes. Sometimes key things that promote children's learning are missing from the environment. For instance, an environment may not have play materials, the space may not be safe for child exploration, or family members may not be available or know how to facilitate children's play and exploration. When children have limited access to key experiences in the home environment, it is critical that they have access to and support for

play with various toys and materials within the group care setting. Making the most of learning opportunities by sitting close by and commenting on what children are doing, extending language, and asking questions to prompt exploration are all important strategies in the early learning setting. Connecting families to home visiting programs, local libraries, or conducting home visits as part of your program can also be a good way to give families additional resources, help them use their everyday materials in new or expanded ways, and extend facilitated play into the home.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Infant–toddler educators support concept development by setting up environments to encourage young children's exploration while using conversations during that play to build on children's understanding. The use of language to reinforce concepts is important for all children and requires a thoughtful and linguistically responsive approach when working with children learning multiple languages. Some concepts introduced and learned may be unique to the school or home setting. However, more often infants and toddlers have similar experiences across both settings that early educators can help link and extend. It is important for teachers to engage and build trust with parents and families to create supportive home-school connections

that foster concept and additional development. Connecting with children in a familiar language is ideal as infant–toddler educators strive to help children master concepts and develop proficiency in a second language. For example, teachers can build on the words a child already knows. A child may hold up a round-shaped piece of play-dough during play and say, "Tortilla." Teachers can expand on this statement by saying, "Tortilla! A corn tortilla. Yummy! May I eat it?" (Hirschler, 2005). Careful scaffolding and bridging between two languages will help children transfer from one language to another and create synergies in their learning process.

**What does *facilitating children’s exploration and concept development* look like In practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Maribel, a 5-month-old in Emma’s child care program, is enjoying time on the floor and has begun to reach for various toys. Emma notices her attempts to reach a squeaking toy that is just out of her arm’s range. Emma moves closer to Maribel and says, “I see you reaching for that rubber duck, let me help you. I am going to move that toy a little closer so you can pick it up.” After moving the toy, Maribel wiggles her body to grab the toy, Emma says, “Wow, Maribel, you got the duck!” As Maribel brings the toy to her mouth and bites on it, the duck makes a squeaking sound. Maribel startles at the noise and takes it out of her mouth. Emma smiles, making eye contact, and says, “Oh, you made it squeak with your mouth.” Emma presses on the duck, “When I press on the duck’s belly, it squeaks. You can make it squeak, too.” Maribel mouths the toy again, likely anticipating its squeak.</p>	<p>One-year-old Jamie has been working on placing shapes into their correct cut outs on the shape sorter off and on for the last week. Manuela has noticed that sometimes he gets upset and frustrated when the shapes don’t slide in. When that happens, Jamie has been dropping the toy and moving on to another activity. Today Manuela has made sure that she can be on the floor while Jamie explores the toy. When Jamie starts to struggle and drops the toy, Manuela says, “That star is a hard shape to fit, Jamie, but you are doing a great job turning it until it fits.” Jamie picks the toy back up and tries again, looking back and forth between the toy and Manuela. Manuela says, “That’s it, Jamie, you are getting really close.” As he continues to struggle, Manuela asks, “May I help you?” When Jamie nods yes Manuela places her hand on his and says, “I think if we just slide it a little bit more to this side it will fit. See, I am lining up the top of the star with the top of the slot and that helps me make sure it is straight. Do you want to try?” Jamie nods yes and Manuela has him try the alignment strategy with an easier shape, the square. Encouraged by success with the square, Jamie is ready to try the star again. Manuela stays close by to prompt him through the process and ensure his success.</p>	<p>Tommy, a 30-month-old, is sitting on Laura’s lap reading a book about fruits and vegetables. When they turn to a page containing cherries, Tommy points to the cherry and says, “Apple!” Laura smiles and looks at the book saying, “It does look like an apple, Tommy, doesn’t it? It is red like an apple, and it is round like an apple, but this is actually a fruit called a cherry.” Laura points to the stem of the cherry and says, “See how the cherry has a long stem on the top? Cherries have long stems, and apples have very short stems.” She pauses while Tommy looks at the picture then adds, “Also cherries are much smaller than apples.” Laura continues, “Let’s find the page with apples on it and we can look at them to see.” Laura turns to the page with apples and points them out to Tommy, “See the apple on this page—it is much bigger than the cherry.” Laura also points out the stem, “See the stem on top of the apple? It is short and thick. The cherry stem (she flips back to that page) is long and thin.” Laura summarizes with, “Cherries and apples look alike and they are both fruits, but they are different types of fruit. Maybe you can find some the next time you go to the market with your family and teach us the words in Spanish.”</p>

## C-2. Competencies to Support Cognitive Development: Building Meaningful Curriculum

*Educators assume an active role both in their structuring of the environment to provide age-appropriate cognitive challenges and in their immediate interaction with the child to stimulate new discovery. In many respects, this approach might be considered a “purposeful play-based” curriculum.*

—IOM & NRC (2015), p. 253

Infant–toddler educators often wonder about how much, if any, teacher-directed or planned activity is developmentally appropriate when working with infants and toddlers. Concepts such as explicit teaching or instructional support seem out of place in a program designed to be flexible and responsive to individual needs and preferences; yet, there is a role for the infant–toddler educator in making sure that young children have experiences that teach them about the world around them and introduce them to basic foundational concepts in a meaningful, developmentally appropriate way. Sometimes these experiences happen naturally within a group setting environment, emerging from children’s own interests and real-life experiences, but other times teachers need to carefully plan for and provide such experiences in the

group setting in a purposeful, teacher-guided way. Providing these experiences helps infants and toddlers build background knowledge about things in their environment, community, and daily lives that provide a foundational knowledge base upon which more discrete concepts can be understood and assimilated later. For instance, noticing and commenting on seasonal changes in nature while on stroller rides or short walks in the community is a great time for caregivers to comment, “Do you see how the leaves on that tree are falling onto the ground? That means winter is coming soon!” or noting the change in temperature, “Today we don’t need to wear jackets because it is getting warmer out. It gets warmer in the spring time.” Infants and toddlers can begin to notice these changes in the world around them as teachers set the stage for a more complex understanding of seasonal cycles and environmental changes during the later early childhood years. An important factor during the infant–toddler years is exposing children to a variety of experiences and activities that increase their familiarity with these and other basic concepts.

Infant–toddler educators who *build meaningful curriculum* demonstrate the following observable skills:

- C-2a** Organize and provide experiences that increase children’s understanding of the world around them and how they fit into this world (e.g., laying out squares of fabric of different textures so that infants can explore a variety of sensory experiences)
- C-2b** When possible, and in response to children’s interests, bring children into the community to help them develop background knowledge of the homes, vehicles, and professionals (e.g., fire fighters, farmers) they see in the world around them; include photos of their community into the setting to extend learning
- C-2c** For toddlers beginning at 18 months, plan experiences that introduce information across a wide variety of areas including early math and science concepts such as counting, sorting and matching, understanding quantities (e.g., the concept of “more,” “one,” and “two”), finding patterns, and exploring states of matter such as liquid and solid, different textures and colors
- C-2d** For toddlers beginning at 18 months, plan some experiences to allow for ongoing exploration (e.g., project or theme-based learning opportunities that extend over days and weeks)
- C-2e** Provide experiences with the specific intent to introduce new ideas and build children’s knowledge of concepts such as dump/fill, in/out, and up/down
- C-2f** Provide direction for using learning materials or teaching how to do things when there are specific methods or approaches that increase chances for, or are needed for success (e.g., dressing, puzzle-working, or using a shape sorter)



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Similar to the need to focus on facilitating play and exploration for children who may lack these experiences in their home environment, providing exposure to novel content is also critical. Resources like books, play props, and materials that provide new or deeper content related to a child's interest can extend children's learning about the world beyond their own home and community, as well as expand their vocabularies. Providing access to a variety of books in the early childhood setting is especially important if a child's home environment lacks children's books. In addition, using early childhood program experiences, materials, and even community outings to build background knowledge for children helps provide a foundation to build future knowledge upon. Introducing new vocabulary and modeling new ways to reason about the world around them is an important early learning activity that may be missing in low-resource homes and communities. Purposefully building in curricular activities

to enhance children's exposure to age-appropriate, challenging new content can be a mechanism to encourage curiosity and love of learning.

Building on routines and providing sufficient opportunities for practice with supports in place for learning to occur will help to ensure that children with delays and disabilities maximize their learning within the infant–toddler caregiving environment. The regular exchange of ideas and strategies between family members and teachers facilitates collaboration and coordination of intervention between home and the early learning program. A team approach with special instructors, speech language therapists, and/or other service providers as appropriate can provide adaptations to the curriculum that supports meaningful participation for all children.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

For children learning multiple languages, it is crucial to incorporate learning resources in the children's home language(s) and materials that resonate with their cultural backgrounds. As children are exposed to new objects and ideas, they can connect back to words and meanings that they have already learned in their own language. Some children who speak a language other than English at home will find it easier to connect with learning materials that are inclusive of their cultural experiences and home language. A teacher might want to use more open-ended or multipurpose objects rather than store-bought toys to allow children to express ways in which these items can be functional and serve as learning materials. For example, teachers can incorporate pots, pans, cardboard boxes, and other items that might be found in the children's households. As an infant–toddler educator, ask: "Does the child already know

this object or concept in his native language?" If not, then "How can I connect the new learning experience to the context of his home environment?" Labeling objects in multiple languages will help children continue to master both their home and a new language. Educators can narrate as children are using and discovering an item, helping them to gain key vocabulary and concepts through engaging play. Whenever possible, connections should be made to the home language. For example, infant–toddler educators can learn key words in children's home languages related to concepts they plan to introduce, such as seasons, food items, or cultural practices. Educators can also use a "buddy" strategy with bi- or multi-lingual toddlers that share the same home language so they can help each other with comprehension.

**What does *building meaningful curriculum* look like in practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Liam, a 4-month-old in Julia’s family child care home, loves to watch Julia sing songs and do finger plays with the older toddlers in the program. Recently, Liam has started moving his hands in response to the familiar sounds of Julia’s singing. Julia has decided to introduce a simple finger play that Liam can join. She shares the song and actions to “Open, Shut Them” opening and closing her hands so the small group of children can learn the new hand motions. She positions Liam in her lap, facing out so that he can see her hands in front of him, and also watch his older peers complete the song and hand motions. Julia knows that by introducing a song that is simple enough for Liam to enjoy, and still fun for older toddlers, she will scaffold Liam’s growing interest in music and finger play, while reinforcing the concepts of open and shut.</p>	<p>Ten-month-old Eva is really interested in the world outside the classroom window. While rocking with Flores in the quiet area of the infant–toddler classroom, Eva likes to look out the window and has begun pointing when she sees birds or animals outside on the grassy area by the school. To help expand Eva’s interest in birds, Flores places a plastic bird feeder onto the window with suction cups. Flores knows that as they sit in the rocker she will be able to talk with Eva about the different types of birds and their unique characteristics to build on Eva’s natural curiosity. Flores will also introduce books to the classroom that offer real and accurate pictures of birds to build on Eva’s growing interest.</p>	<p>Recently two of the toddlers in Mary’s infant–toddler classroom have been growing more interested in dressing and undressing themselves for outdoor play. This is a self-help skill that Mary is very interested in supporting. Although Tim and Lisa, the toddlers in her classroom, have been successful with getting their jackets on, they are struggling with the buttons required to complete the task. Although the struggle with buttons is expected at this age, Mary wants to respond to Tim and Lisa’s growing interest in this task and to offer these children the chance to practice the skill. She decides to introduce some explicit instruction for Tim and Lisa to help them practice the skills they need to dress themselves. She brings in several donated shirts with varying sized buttons and, beginning with the easiest to button, she uses them during the morning period of small group play with her older toddlers to demonstrate techniques for successfully getting the button through the hole. She demonstrates how some buttons are easy to get through the hole because the hole is larger, and close to the same size as the button. Mary compares these with the smaller button holes that take some maneuvering to get the button through the hole. She explains that she has noticed several children trying very hard to learn to button their own coats and that sometimes that takes lots of practice. She lets the children know that these will be available in the housekeeping area for them to practice with. To offer further instructional support, Mary makes sure that she checks in regularly with children in the housekeeping area to see if they need one-on-one assistance to be successful with the various buttons.</p>

### C-3. Competencies to Support Cognitive Development: Promoting Imitation, Symbolic Representation, and Play

Infant–toddler educators can promote children’s imitation, symbolic representation, and play skills by playing games like peek-a-boo with young infants and later by promoting imaginary play with toddlers in their group care settings. Early games with infants, such as peek-a-boo or hiding an object briefly while an infant is engaged, work to promote object permanence, or the understanding that an object exists even when it is out of sight. Later, as toddlers engage in symbolic or imaginary play, teachers can support toddlers as they act out familiar scenarios and take on pretend roles—parenting a baby doll for instance. As toddlers’ development of symbolic representation deepens, teachers can also encourage the use of one object to stand for another (e.g., using a small block as a telephone). Emerging imaginary play skills can be supported by infant–toddler educators who join in pretend play scenarios when invited, and participate in back-and-forth exchanges (verbal and nonverbal) to extend the imaginary play. As children develop these skills, educators can add to imaginary scenarios by introducing new props, asking open-ended questions about what will happen next in the play, inviting peers into the play, and promoting the exchange of language during play scenarios.

*... Stimulation in social interaction that provokes young children’s interest, elicits their curiosity, and provides an emotional context ... enables them to focus their thinking on new discoveries. The central and consistent feature of all these activities is the young child’s shared activity with an adult who thoughtfully capitalizes on his or her interests to provoke cognitive growth.*

—IOM & NRC (2015), p. 102

**Infant–toddler educators who promote imitation, symbolic representation, and play demonstrate the following observable skills:**

- C-3a** Imitate sounds, gestures, and facial expressions of infants to promote emerging imitation play skills
- C-3b** Talk about things that are not present in the early learning setting for example, what the child did at home that morning before coming to school; relate current events and activities to previous activities, for example:
  - *“Noah, did you and Mom take Rex [Noah’s dog] for a walk this morning? I remember your mom said that some mornings you walk Rex before getting on the bus to come to school.”*
- C-3c** Model, initiate, or participate in children’s imitative or imaginary play, taking turns and responding to toddlers’ prompts or ideas
- C-3d** Promote parallel, associative, and emerging cooperative play within the early learning program in response to children’s interest and developmental readiness by joining play to promote social play and modelling conflict resolution for toddlers as needed
- C-3e** Arrange activities and the play environment to promote opportunities for play in small groups of 2–3 toddlers while still allowing for supervision in case support is needed
- C-3f** Participate in play, modeling social interaction and scaffolding young children’s emerging cooperative skills such as taking turns with favorite toys or other objects, or commenting on other children’s actions

**Infant–toddler educators who promote imitation, symbolic representation, and play demonstrate the following observable skills (contd.):**

- C-3g** Introduce props (e.g., small wooden block) to represent real-life items (e.g., phone) during toddlers' imitative and imaginary play in response to toddlers' interest and developmental readiness
- C-3h** Organize the environment to encourage pretend play sequences in a variety of contexts (e.g., including toy cars and trucks in the block area or puppets and dress-up clothes in the book corner)
- C-3i** Connect toddlers' imaginary play to familiar plots from story books and real life situations (e.g., meal-time or bed-time in the home) to help children make connections to known narratives or experiences
- C-3j** Extend pretend play sequences as toddlers grow by asking questions, introducing a new prop or character, or suggesting a significant change in a play plot, for example:
- *"What happens next?"*
  - *"Oh look, here is a shell; I wonder if we can use this in our story?"*
  - *"Today I think mama bear will choose to sleep in baby bear's bed! What do you think will happen if she does?"*

**Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations**

Ensuring that all children are engaged with the environment and each other provides opportunities for both instructional and social inclusion that are essential for the growth and development of young children with delays and disabilities. Inclusion of children with disabilities in social play requires thoughtful and intentional modeling, shadowing a child as needed, and ultimately scaffolding a growing ability to join and maintain play independently with typically developing peers.

When children's vulnerabilities are related to challenging events in their home or community, providing children from vulnerable populations with opportunities for imaginary and imitative play is an important and safe way to allow children to express their feelings and perhaps act out experienced real-life scenarios. This play and expression of experiences or themes requires support from a caring adult who can help make sense of these emotions and experiences. Joining in simple imitative and imaginary play can allow the child to cope with challenges such as a frightening experiences, stressful situations, or changes in family routines (e.g., seeing a loud barking dog, hearing a thunderstorm, hearing Mom and Dad yelling at each other, seeing a house fire or car accident). This support can also help the child engage in problem solving and achieve a sense of mastery. Imaginative play can offer a chance for infant–toddler educators to recast stressful scenarios in ways that support children's understanding and growth of social skills. For example, if a young

toddler imitates hitting a stuffed animal or other play prop, adults can sensitively recast this scenario with verbal and nonverbal support. For instance asking, "Amelia, why are you hitting the puppy?" And then carefully listening to plan and individualize a supportive response such as, "It sounds like you want that puppy to lie down in your lap, what else can you try to get her to do that?" Providing a child with opportunities to identify helpers in play can let the child know that she can find adults who can support her when she most needs it. Young children may need to act out the actions and interactions they experience as they try to make sense of them. Providing consistent and sensitive support when a child enacts a stressful scenario can help children learn a different way to manage challenging events and behaviors. However, repetitive re-enactments that seem driven and void of any real joy may represent traumatic play and will not help the child resolve troubling issues. These re-enactments may indicate exposure to violence or to physical or verbal abuse. Although it may be helpful for infant–toddler educators to discuss such concerns with their supervisor or mentor, they should also be aware that early educators are mandated reporters in most states; if an educator suspects or has reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected, they are required to contact the appropriate authorities. It is important for programs and individual educators to know their [state agency designated to process and investigate child abuse and neglect cases](#) and the related laws and policies.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

As infant–toddler educators introduce props to represent real-life items during children’s imitative and imaginary play, it is important to understand that children will often imitate their parents and family members. In the example where a child uses a wooden block to represent a phone, the child might “talk on the phone” by re-enacting the way her mother speaks on the phone and might revert to the parent’s home language. Encourage this type of use of home languages. As children engage in imaginary play they might incorporate plots from story books and real life that might be in another language or come from their country of origin. Ask parents to share

story books and stories from their own families so that children can share some of the same knowledge and engage in joint role play. For toddlers who are interested in playing pretend, teachers can support multi-language learners by modeling the “social script” necessary to join in the game. For example, if children are playing “restaurant” the teacher can model phrases like “What would you like?” or “Do you want a drink with that?” that are necessary to participating in the game. Scaffolding a child’s participation and then phasing oneself out of the peer play when the children are fully engaged supports a child’s opportunity to build symbolic skills.

### What does promoting imitation, symbolic representation, and play look like In practice?

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Eight-month-old Jada is fascinated with her mom’s cell phone. Jada’s mom has told her family child care provider, Ben, that she has to work hard to keep Jada away from her cell phone. Ben decides to imitate cell phone use with a small handheld rattle in the toy area when he has Jada on his lap that afternoon. Jada watches as Ben puts the rattle to his ear and says, “Hello, is this Jada’s mommy? Hi there! Do you want to talk with Jada?” Jada smiles as Ben holds the rattle up to her ear and pretends to be Jada’s mom. “Hi Jada, I hope you are having a good day,” he says in a high-pitched feminine tone, “I’ll be there after your playground time to pick you up.” Jada smiles and turns away from the phone while looking at Ben, “Oh is it for me now, Jada?” Jada nods and Ben places the rattle back to his ear. During pick up time Ben shares his idea with Jada’s mom so she can try it at home with a rattle, small container, or any lightweight household item that can be held in one hand.</p>	<p>While reading aloud to 15-month-old Charlotte, Neena comments on the various cars in the book on transportation. When Charlotte points to a bus Neena comments, “Do you see the yellow school bus? Is that school bus like the one that your brother Sammy takes to kindergarten?” Charlotte nods and then points to another bus on the page and Neena says, “That’s another kind of bus, Charlotte. That bus brings adults like me, and your mom and dad, to places all around our city. This bus is a little bigger than a school bus, and it is not yellow. Can you see in the windows of the bus? There are lots of moms and dads in that bus. In the yellow school bus there are lots of kids like Sammy riding to school.”</p>	<p>While Melissa is playing with 22-month-old Alfredo on the playground she notices that Alfredo is pushing the wagon around the grassy area, stopping to pick up leaves from the ground and put them in the wagon. Melissa saw Alfredo and his mom at the farmers’ market a few weeks ago and she thinks he might be imitating the way his mom pulled him in the wagon, adding vegetables and ingredients to the cart while they walked through the market. She approaches him and comments, “Alfredo, the way you are walking with your wagon reminds me of the time I saw you and your mom at the market.” Alfredo smiles at her and she continues, “Your mom pulled the wagon around the market and picked out vegetables like corn, <i>frijoles</i>, and lettuce to bring home. Your wagon is just like the one your mom used.” Melissa decides to involve Alfredo’s peers and asks, “Cynthia, do you want to help me find some ‘vegetables and <i>frijoles</i>’ for Alfredo to collect in his wagon?”</p>

### C-4. Competencies to Support Cognitive Development: Supporting Reasoning and Problem Solving

*From very early on, children are not simply passive observers, registering the superficial appearance of things. Rather, they are building explanatory systems—implicit theories—that organize their knowledge. Such implicit theories contain causal principles and causal relations; these theories enable children to predict, explain, and reason about relevant phenomena and, in some cases, intervene to change them.*

—IOM & NRC (2015), p. 89

Reasoning and problem solving are learned skills whose roots begin in infancy as babies learn how and why their own actions cause a response in the environment around them. As development proceeds, older infants can begin to solve simple problems such as fitting a shape into a sorter toy with the help of a trusted adult who provides assistance and models effective strategies to get the right shape into the right hole. As toddlers' emerging language skills begin to blossom, promoting the use of words to resolve problems and helping toddlers reflect on how and why these solutions were effective become important teaching skills. Sometimes this means modeling words for toddlers while also providing some physical and emotional supports in the heat of the moment. Problem solving is also supported when caregivers scaffold children through challenging tasks with encouragement and assistance that elevates children's abilities to a new level as they successfully solve the problem—first with a caregiver's assistance and then independently as children develop these skills through practice, support, and modeling provided by the caregiver and more mature peers.

**Infant–toddler educators who support children's reasoning and problem-solving skills demonstrate the following observable skills:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>C-4a</b> Provide support to young infants as they learn to control body movement and become mobile infants; for example, a caregiver can scaffold an infant's ability to roll by laying close to him on the floor and encouraging him to roll in the caregiver's direction with words and physical support</p> <p><b>C-4b</b> Encourage children to persist with tasks by providing new challenges in response to children's developing skill level while intervening to provide support if children become frustrated with the task</p> | <p><b>C-4c</b> Support infants and toddlers to predict, explain, and reason about the people and world around them. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Asking a child what she thinks a caregiver or peer is going to do as they walk across the play area into the kitchen</i></li> <li>• <i>Helping a young toddler notice what can be done to help or assist a younger peer or adult who has dropped something</i></li> <li>• <i>Helping an older toddler understand what food a class pet or other animal eats and how and why this is different from what he eats</i></li> </ul> |
|--|---|

**Infant–toddler educators who support children’s reasoning and problem-solving skills demonstrate the following observable skills (contd.):**

**C-4d** Use different strategies to support problem solving by simplifying problems, providing a variety of types of cues (verbal, visual, modeling, physical), and encouraging children’s attempts to solve problems

**C-4e** Prompt toddlers through social problem solving verbally as needed, for example:

- *“Clara, I see that you are struggling with that shape sorter, I wonder what else you could try to make that oval fit. What if you try turning the piece around?”*

**C-4f** Observe children’s current problem-solving strategies and prompt children, when needed or desired by them, to expand their problem-solving repertoire. If children are not frustrated by failing repeatedly at a task, allow them to persist at solving it.

**C-4g** Comment upon toddlers’ successful problem-solving strategies, for example:

- *“Manuel, I noticed that you walked around Eva and Marco’s floor puzzle to get to the book shelf rather than walking through it. Good thinking.”*



### Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Modeling persistence, self-efficacy, and independent problem solving are critical when working with all children, but may be particularly important for children from home settings where these skills are not modeled, where there are health and safety concerns, or where other life stressors or disabilities prevent a sense of mastery or control. Nurturing these skills in infants and toddlers includes helping them persist with difficult tasks and adding challenge to tasks they have mastered while remaining close to support success. These skills contribute to the young child’s resiliency. Tolerance for failure may

be low in children from vulnerable families if they see adult models who are quick to anger or give up due to mounting pressure or overwhelming stressors. Children’s independent attempts at solving problems may be limited if previous attempts at autonomy have not been supported or if a physical or emotional disability limits a child’s ability to resolve problems independently. If children’s actions have been overly controlled or restricted, preventing the ability to practice independent problem solving, children may need help learning and practicing these skills.



### Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Using language in combination with gestures, props, and demonstration can help multiple-language learners fully understand an infant–toddler educator’s suggestions and problem-solving strategies. For older toddlers, understanding and using the child’s preferred language for “I need help” can also assist the educator in knowing when a child has reached her limit with a challenging task. In addition to considering these types of language barriers in supporting children’s problem solving, educators also need to think about cultural influences on approaches to problem solving. For children who come from diverse backgrounds or who speak multiple languages, it is important to consider that their problem-solving process might be shaped by their culture’s value system. What children

value and know, their attitudes (e.g., biases), whom they trust, and their access to resources will influence how they construct, decide on, and implement a strategy to answer an open-ended question or achieve a desired goal. For example, an infant who has never been exposed to an object might spend more time exploring that object than actually using it and will need to be exposed to modeling behaviors so the child can understand the object’s intended purpose. At the same time, the same object might be used in other ways by the child’s family. For example, a child might use a pan and spoon as a drum and drum stick. This is a creative way of using the objects as well as familiar items in a child’s household.

**Overarching Principles: Details from the Irving Harris Foundation’s *Diversity-Informed Infant Mental Health Tenets***

**Support Families in Their Preferred Language:** Families are best supported in facilitating infants’ development and mental health when services are available in their native languages.

**What does *supporting children’s reasoning and problem-solving skills* look like In practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>As Valerie, a 4-month-old in Jane’s family child care program, handles a rattle, the beads inside make a soft noise. Valerie looks at Jane who holds her gaze and says, “Did you hear that noise? That was your toy. When you move that toy it makes a noise.” Jane gently places her hand on Valerie’s and moves it back and forth until the beads inside begin to rattle. Valerie looks at her hand and Jane says, “See! The beads move inside that toy. Do you hear them?” Valerie waves her hand randomly, making the toy rattle, and smiles at Jane.</p>	<p>While 10-month-old Aaliyah explores the small play table in the dramatic play area, she crawls under it and can’t quite figure out how to back herself out of the tight space. She begins to exhibit signs of frustration while trying to come out from under the table. Sadie asks, “Aaliyah, I wonder if you put your head out first and then try to crawl out it would be easier than scooting on your bottom?” Sadie also moves closer to Aaliyah to demonstrate her attention to Aaliyah’s task. When Aaliyah continues to struggle and furrows her brow while making eye contact with Sadie, Sadie gets on her hands and knees to model the crawling position. Aaliyah watches Sadie and smiles as she moves her body into position and easily crawls forward. Sadie smiles back saying, “There you go Aaliyah. I know you like that private space, next time please crawl out the way you crawled in.” Aaliyah smiles and crawls back under the table to try again.</p>	<p>When Jayce and Oliver are playing with trucks in the block area, Oliver begins to use his truck to knock over Jayce’s block tower. Jayce screeches in protest and begins to cry. Jayce and Oliver’s teacher, Kayla, quickly positions herself at Jayce’s level and makes eye contact. With a gentle arm on his back to keep him focused on her words she adds, “Jayce, what could you say to Oliver to explain that when he drives his truck there, your blocks fall over?” Jayce quickly says, “I don’t like that!” Kayla looks at Oliver and asks, “Did you hear what Jayce said?” Oliver nods yes. Kayla asks, “What do you think Jayce is feeling right now? How can we fix this problem?” She supports Jayce and Oliver as they work through a solution where Oliver has part of the block area for truck play and Jayce moves his building blocks to the other, more protected side of the block area. Kayla stays close by to ensure that their compromise is successful.</p>

## Area 3: Supporting Language and Literacy Development

Developing language and literacy skills begins at birth through everyday loving interactions—sharing books, telling stories, singing songs, and talking to one another. Infants’ and toddlers’ language development is supported through positive and nurturing interactions with caregivers who are responsive and tuned in to young children’s earliest attempts at communication. Infant–toddler educators “use language based learning to develop trusting bonds, use talk for learning, engage in language-rich play, read a variety of books, and reread favorites” (IOM & NRC, 2015, pp. 255–256). These fundamental experiences with language provide a strong foundation for learning across developmental domains. Indeed, “the oral language and vocabulary children learn through interactions with parents, siblings, and caregivers and through high-quality interactions with educators provide the foundation for later literacy and for learning across all subject areas, as well as for their socioemotional well-being” (IOM & NRC, 2015, p. 112).



Photo © Kiwi Street Studios

The core knowledge and attitudes previously summarized from ZERO TO THREE’s *Cross-Sector Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age 5 Field* (ZERO TO THREE, 2015; see [Core Knowledge and Attitudes Summary](#)) are the foundation for the following specific competencies that can help infant–toddler educators ensure that children’s language and literacy development is optimized.

### Specifics for Infant–Toddler Educators

Educators are the key ingredient in a language-rich environment for infants and toddlers in group care settings. By narrating their own actions and those of young children, using natural conversations throughout the day to reinforce the back and forth exchange of information, and speaking in complete sentences, infant–toddler educators ensure that children are immersed in language. Infant-toddler educators ensure that this language immersion is in response to a young child’s primary language—including the primary language spoken in the child’s home or, for children with hearing impairments, sign language. Infant–toddler educators also use various types of talk, descriptive language, and varied vocabulary to provide foundational guidance and experience with language. Such an approach supports learning across all developmental areas and future subject-specific learning in the preschool and elementary years.

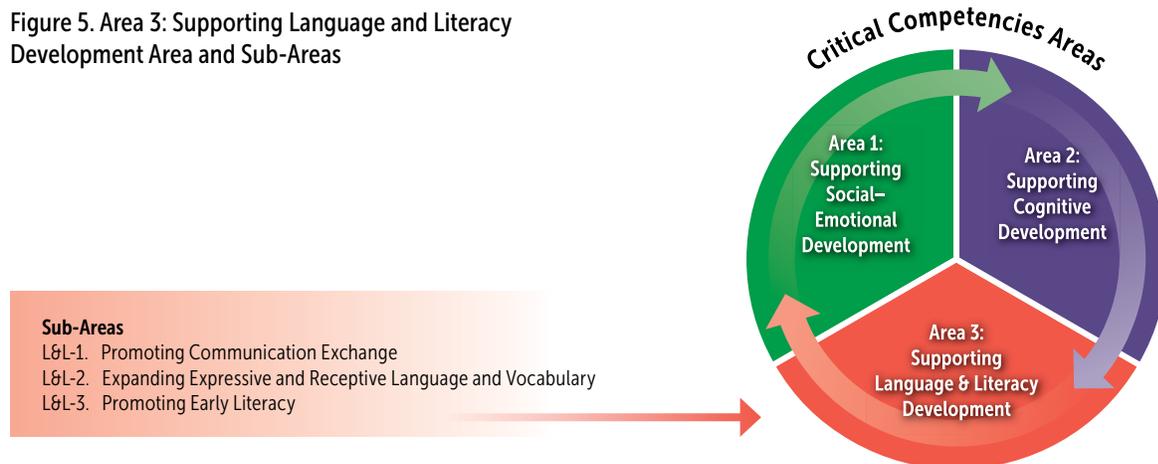
Specific infant–toddler educator competencies that support **language and literacy development** are presented in three sub-areas:

**L&L-1.** [Promoting Communication Exchange](#)

**L&L-3.** [Promoting Early Literacy](#)

**L&L-2.** [Expanding Expressive and Receptive Language and Vocabulary](#)

Figure 5. Area 3: Supporting Language and Literacy Development Area and Sub-Areas



### L&L-1. Competencies to Support Language and Literacy Development: Promoting Communication Exchange

*Consistently responding to infants' and toddlers' communication with talk and encouragement that is emotionally attuned is crucial for early language development.*

—IOM & NRC (2015), p. 255

Even before infants and toddlers are verbal they benefit from the back-and-forth interaction that includes language from the caregiver. Infant–toddler educators promote language and communication exchange by reading and responding to young children’s earliest attempts to communicate their emotional, physical, and social needs. A baby’s cries or nonverbal signs communicate many things—sometimes it indicates hunger or fatigue, sometimes it is a request for interaction or comfort. By responding to these communication attempts verbally and nonverbally (e.g., “It sounds like you are ready to get out of your crib. Would you like to come out?”) and then waiting for a child’s response (extending arms toward the child while waiting and watching for him to make eye contact or to reach his arms up to indicate he is ready to be picked up and taken out of the crib), infant–toddler educators teach children that there is a back-and-forth exchange to communication and that their communication efforts result in a caring response that meets their expressed need. At the same time, these responses also set the stage for conversational exchange when children begin to express themselves verbally or with sign language. Sign language is also another way to reinforce communication with all pre-verbal children and helps support emerging and varied communication efforts. Competent infant–toddler educators support early communication attempts with their own language to model and support the development of these emerging expressive language skills.

Infant–toddler educators who *promote communication exchange* demonstrate the following observable skills:

- L&L-1a** Wait and watch for both verbal and nonverbal responses to promote back-and-forth conversational interaction, understanding that verbal behavior toward an infant is important as a precursor to expressive language skills that will emerge as infants mature
- L&L-1b** Use a mix of open-ended and short-response questions, waiting for a response (verbal or nonverbal) before moving to a new or follow-up question or comment, for example:
- *“Julia, would you like help with that puzzle?” When Julia nods yes, “Here, let’s turn it this way [helping Julia move the puzzle piece] and see if it will fit.”*
  - *“Lucia, I see you have the wooden spoons out, what are you going to do with them today?”*
- L&L-1c** Take a turn in response to a child’s invitation or initiation
- L&L-1d** After waiting and watching for a response, verbally model a response to more complex questions for toddlers, for example:
- *Beth asks, “Alex, are you building a road for your cars?” “Yup, these cars go fast!” he says. Sarah builds on Alex’s response by saying, “It looks like those cars are going really fast. I see you built your road with a steep hill in it. The cars roll faster when they roll down the hill.”*
- L&L-1e** Balance questions with other forms of communication such as short comments to offer a new way of thinking about a concept, for example:
- *“Shelby, your bucket is full. I think you need a larger container to hold all of those balls you are collecting. What can we do about that?”*
- L&L-1f** Use questions to extend or initiate conversation in ways that build on toddler’s interests or activities, for example:
- *“Sandra, it looks like you are cooking something delicious in the kitchen. Can you please tell me about what you are making?”*
- L&L-1g** Use explanations and reasoning to help children understand why things happen, to evaluate a choice or solution, or to expand understanding of concepts, for example:
- *“Andrew, I think we need to put your jacket on before we go outside. Let’s look outside to see. What does it look like outside? How shall we dress for outdoor time today?”*



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Asking questions, encouraging children to ask questions, and extending conversations for infants and toddlers through a back-and-forth exchange of verbal and nonverbal communication works to build children's expressive and receptive language skills. These skills are critical for children whose exposure to language in their home environment may be limited. For children from low-income homes this is especially true as research has shown that differences in language skills between children from low-socioeconomic status home and those of their more affluent peers are evident as early as 9 months old (Halle et al., 2009). In addition to supporting infants' and toddlers' exposure to language in the early learning program, educators can partner with families to help them think through how

they can provide language during everyday routines like shopping for groceries, taking the bus, or walking in the neighborhood. Provide simple examples such as, "When you're grocery shopping, you can talk about the foods you are choosing and ask your young child questions such as 'Do you like sweet potatoes, Jeremy?' pause and wait for a verbal or nonverbal response, and continue, 'I think you do, let's add these to our cart. Hmmm, what's next on our list?'" Remember that children don't need to be communicating with words to take part in the conversation. Eye gaze or joint attention, smiling, nodding, or listening intently are all ways that babies take part in language exchange and begin to understand the back-and-forth quality of conversations.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

If children in your program are from non-English speaking homes, bilingualism or multilingualism can be supported by promoting language expression in the child's native language(s) while also providing exposure to English. Because early learning environments may represent new and unfamiliar grounds for an infant or toddler, teachers must be aware that children will naturally seek to use their full range of communicative skills, including any speech they have and, perhaps most frequently and in the case of children who know other languages, nonverbal behaviors. Children first develop their actual ability to communicate and then acquire and develop speech and language—hence "language exchange" is much more than the child's speech. In order to truly measure language exchange, teachers need to look at the range of their communicative skills and not just the presence or absence of child's speech. Language exchange, including development and speech, will emerge as a result of participation in everyday activities and play that requires communication. It is also important to note that uneven vocabulary knowledge is common for young dual-language learners. Children might know more words in the language to which they have most exposure and might initially be able to contextualize more words for their home language. Furthermore, code-mixing and code-switching

is a normal and expected part of dual-language development and does not indicate confusion or limited language skills. Code-mixing is applying the grammar or structure of one language to the vocabulary of another language. For example, a child might say, "*Quiero 'consin' aguacate*" ("I want with/without avocado"). Code-switching is switching back and forth between languages, often in the same sentence, which is also very common among multilingual learners, generally starting at about 2 years old, when they have the ability to separate their languages. For example, a child might say: "I want *mi mami*" ("I want my mommy") or "Please pass me the *servilletas*" ("Please pass me the napkins."). Other reasons for switching include socio-cultural factors such as the prestige of knowing multiple languages or a second language associated with ample global interest and social status (e.g., English). It is not always the case that borrowing or switching occurs because children do not know the words in one or the other language, but it can often indicate greater or less shift toward learning to operate in multilingual and multicultural societies. More practically, switching reflects the young child's desire to communicate: if a relevant word is not immediately accessible in one language, the child may use the other language to get the message across.

**What does promoting children’s communication exchange look like In practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>As Carrie feeds Elwin his bottle she holds him close and gazes into his eyes. When 6-month-old Elwin raises his hand to Carrie’s cheek, she lets him feel the texture of her skin and says, “That’s my cheek, you’re touching my cheek.” She gently places her free hand on Elwin’s cheek and adds, “This is Elwin’s cheek. It’s soft and smooth.” Elwin then grabs her finger and holds it. Carrie says, “Now you have my finger in your hand. I like holding hands with you while you enjoy your bottle, Elwin.”</p>	<p>Fifteen-month-old Xavier likes to play with simple wooden puzzles. His teacher, Yolanda, sits near to him on the floor as he works a simple shape puzzle. She talks out loud about what he is doing. “Xavier, it looks like you’re trying to place the orange circle in your puzzle.” Xavier looks up and motions for Yolanda to take the circle. “Do you need help, Xavier?” Xavier makes a verbalization and Yolanda responds by saying, “Yes, I would love to help you.” Then she narrates her strategy, “Let’s see, I think if we line up the edge of the circle here [pointing to it] with the edge of the puzzle slot here [she points to the cut out circle], it might help us fit it in.” “Do you want to help me?” Xavier nods yes and together, hand over hand, he and Yolanda place the circle. Yolanda is careful to let Xavier take the lead, rather than just placing the circle for him. “Xavier, we lined up the edges of the circle to make it fit. Thanks for helping.”</p>	<p>Jorge, 34 months old, is pushing the shopping cart through Alicia’s infant–toddler classroom. Jorge is a dual-language learner. At home his family speaks primarily Spanish. Alicia comments on his play, “Jorge it looks like you might be on your way to the grocery store.” When Jorge looks up and smiles, Alicia asks, “What are you going shopping for?” She pauses until Jorge responds, “O’s!” excitedly. Alicia responds with matched enthusiasm to expand Jorge’s language, “You’re shopping for Cheerios—yummy, I know those are your favorite cereal. I like Cheerios for breakfast, too. What else are you shopping for?” Jorge says, “<i>Plátano</i>” to Alicia who responds, “<i>Plátano</i>, banana. That will go well with our Cheerios.” Alicia and Jorge continue this back–and–forth exchange as Jorge offers additional food items he will add to his cart and goes back and forth between English and Spanish words.</p>

## L&L-2. Competencies to Support Language and Literacy Development: Expanding Expressive and Receptive Language and Vocabulary

Infant–toddler educators build young children’s expressive and receptive language and vocabulary through purposeful use of language to narrate their own actions and those of the children in their care. They use language to communicate, to calm, to prepare for transitions, and to share play and other pleasurable experiences through the day. Infant–toddler educators also use language to comfort children in distress and to help children solve problems. Finally, infant–toddler educators use language to add richness to children’s everyday experiences and as children observe the world around them, for example, to expand their understanding of processes, patterns, spatial and numerical terms and concepts, and also to share humor. Exposure to language in these ways helps infants and toddlers understand the power of language and its multiple uses while exposing them to a varied vocabulary which, over time, maps new words onto known concepts. Using talk for learning in these ways is the foundation of high-quality learning experiences for infants and toddlers in group care. Language helps educators build and nurture relationships with one another and with the young children in their care. Use of language in these ways is a vital strategy for infant–toddler educators to scaffold young children’s exploration and understanding of the world around them.

*Educators of infants and toddlers create high quality language environments when they intentionally and thoughtfully use their own talk—through explanations, questioning, and descriptions—to build up the knowledge of those in their care. This instructional use of talk includes “narrating” events of the day (e.g., “we’re crossing the road to get to the park”) and describing children’s actions as they are performing them (e.g., “you’re putting your hand in the warm mitten”).*

—IOM & NRC (2015), p. 255

**Infant–toddler educators who expand children’s expressive and receptive language and vocabulary demonstrate the following observable skills:**

**L&L-2a** Repeat and extend children’s language(s) by imitating young infants’ babbling, expanding children’s utterances, adding words, or modeling complete sentences in context, for example:

- *When Jacob uses the sign for more and says “Moah” at breakfast, Peter responds by saying, “Jacob, it looks like you want more fruit. More cantaloupe please.”*

**L&L-2b** Verbally label objects and actions and encourage children to point to and/or verbalize the names of objects and actions by occasionally prompting them to do so; avoid repetitive or intrusive requests for children to label, for example:

- *“Jessie, I see you are pointing at the book about animals, what animal do you see on the cover?”*

**L&L-2c** Work in partnership with families of dual-/multi-language learners to support home language development and to learn commonly used and familiar words in the child’s home language(s) for use across settings

**L&L-2d** Narrate own actions while they are happening and narrate children’s actions while they are happening. Describe/narrate interesting events, processes or patterns observed by children in the world around them, for example:

- *“I do see the garbage truck! The truck picked up the Dumpster to shake out all the garbage. That big metal box is called a Dumpster and it’s where we dump all our trash at the end of the day.”*

**Infant–toddler educators who expand children’s expressive and receptive language and vocabulary demonstrate the following observable skills (contd.):**

- L&L-2e** Use a variety of specific and descriptive words and map these words onto known or familiar concepts, for example:
- *If a toddler says “more melon” at snack time, a teacher might say, “Here is some more melon,” while serving the fruit to the toddler. She might also add, “This melon is called a cantaloupe. Yesterday we had a type of melon that was green and called honeydew; there are many types of melon.”*
- L&L-2f** Engage children in conversations by using language that focuses on shared experiences or shared attention
- L&L-2g** Use child-directed language, extending syllables, ranging pitch, and varying tone of voice to extend children’s attention during language activities and play
- L&L-2h** Use diverse words from different categories like objects, actions, feelings, and words that identify groups or sets of things (e.g., animals, people, types of transportation)
- L&L-2i** Speak in complete sentences and vary the types of sentences used throughout the day; extend conversations on a single topic (see L&L-1e ) rather than quickly moving from one topic to another
- L&L-2j** Use proper grammar and vocabulary to provide a positive language model



## Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Exposure to language is important for all children, and studies of children raised in low-income homes have shown a difference in the level of exposure to language and dialogue which can influence the development of language skills critical to academic and social success. The “word gap” has come to symbolize the gulf that can separate very young children who have rich opportunities for positive early learning experiences from those who do not. As a group, children in families of lower socioeconomic means have fewer skills and know far fewer words than their more privileged peers (ZERO TO THREE, n.d.-a). Exposing children to a variety of words and uses of language is important in promoting language expression and exchange in the infant–toddler years. Talk with infants and toddlers from the start so that exposure to conversation, interesting dialogue, and the value of language for communication is supported. Bathing

infants and toddlers in language through conversation, storytelling, reading, poems, finger plays, and sound and word games should be part of the daily curriculum, occurring naturally throughout the day (Gonzalez-Mena & Eyer, 2014). Some children may not be as responsive as others, especially children with delays and disabilities. It is natural to engage more with children who are responsive and seem to enjoy interactions. Keep in mind how important it is that all children hear language and have language directed to them with opportunities to respond. Encourage talking, reading, and playing in the home during parent–teacher conversations. Plan to engage with all children and provide additional opportunities for the children with delays and disorders to foster their growth. Match your language to the child’s target learning by using slightly more complex language models than the child is currently using.



## Considerations for Supporting Dual-/Multi-Language Learners

Children who learn multiple languages will often need to learn multiple words for the same objects. For example, a child that knows English and Russian will be learning how to say “banana” in both languages. When counting the number of words that a child has acquired, count words in both languages. It might seem like children who are multilingual know fewer words than those who are monolingual, but the opposite is true as it’s necessary to count the languages known by the child to obtain an accurate assessment. In general, multilingual children reach language milestones at the same rate as monolingual children—including the timing of babbling, their first word, combining two words, and using a 50-word vocabulary. Learning two languages does not cause a delay in development,

however, children are developing “two separate but connected linguistic systems” (a term first used by Genesee et al., 2004; see also Castro, Páez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2011; Espinosa, 2008 & 2014), thus the rate of language development among dual-language learner toddlers varies in direct relation to their relative amount of exposure to each language (Hoff et al., 2012). It is critically important that, whenever possible, educators use key words in the child’s home language and that parents continue to expose the child to rich, descriptive interactions in the child’s home language. Educators and families can make a coordinated effort to ensure the child develops expressive and receptive vocabulary in both languages.

### What does *expanding children’s expressive and receptive language and vocabulary* look like in practice?

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>While Victoria changes 4-month-old Diego’s diaper in the changing room she narrates what she is doing. She does this so that he knows what she is doing and how she will handle his body, but also to model vocabulary for him. As she picks up his diaper, she shows it to him and says, “Look, it’s Diego’s diaper. Okay, Diego, let’s change your diaper. I’m going to take your wet diaper off and wipe your bottom with a cool cloth.” As Victoria wipes Diego she comments, “Does that feel cold? I am sorry it’s a little cold and wet. After we wipe, your bottom will be clean and feel much better.” As she attaches Diego’s diaper she says, “There we go, all done until the next time. Do you feel better?” She pauses and waits for Diego’s response. When he makes eye contact she says, “Yes, there you are, I bet you feel much better now.”</p>	<p>Twelve-month-old Isiah is beginning to use a few words to indicate his needs. During breakfast, as Julia is cutting up bananas, Isiah says, “Ma.” Julia responds, “<i>Más? More?</i> Would you like more banana, Isiah?” When Isiah nods his head up and down to say yes Julia says, “You’re nodding your head up and down, I think that means yes.” As Julia slices the banana, she says, “I am cutting up some banana for you,” and places the slices on his tray. While Isiah eats his banana Julia uses descriptive language, “I see you are chewing up that banana really well. I think you like bananas.” Isiah says, “Mmm, mmmm.” Julia responds, “I like them, too. Bananas are soft and sweet.” After pausing for Isiah’s response, Julie adds, “We have bananas for breakfast here at school, and I bet you have bananas at home, too.”</p>	<p>When 22-month-old Parna points to a truck outside the window of her family child care home and says “Truck,” Hannah responds by repeating and extending her language. “You’re right, Parna, that is a truck. It’s a garbage truck. That truck will pick up all of the trash in those cans on our sidewalk, can you see them?” When Parna points to the cans and says, “There!” Hannah responds, “Yes, those are our blue trash cans. The blue cans have trash in them. Do you put trash cans on your sidewalk at home?” Parna nods yes, and Hannah says, “I thought so. I have trash cans at my house, too. The dump truck comes by and picks them up. Does the dump truck come to your house, too?”</p>

### L&L-3. Competencies to Support Language and Literacy Development: Promoting Early Literacy

*Infants and toddlers enjoy listening to, and engaging with, a variety of books: board books with faces, animals, and objects that you can talk about; predictable books that quickly become familiar favorites; and books that include new information and ideas that begin to open up young children's worlds and extend their vocabulary and knowledge. Early educators should make shared book reading part of the daily routine, thereby building children's language as well as their interest in print.*

—IOM & NRC (2015), p. 256

Early experiences with book reading, word play, and songs are essential to literacy development and should be part of the daily experiences of infants and toddlers in group settings. Long before children are readers, they can develop an appreciation for the sounds of language (phonological awareness) through the songs, imitation, and sound plays that all cultures share with their infants. Very young children also begin to associate pleasure with reading when they share this experience with a loving adult (Im, Obsorn, Sanchez & Thorp, 2007). Looking at early literacy development as a dynamic developmental process, we can see the connection (and meaning) between an infant mouthing a book, the book handling behavior of a 2-year-old, and the page turning of a 5-year-old. We can see that the first 3 years of exploring and playing with books, singing nursery rhymes, listening to stories, recognizing words, and scribbling are truly the building blocks for language and literacy development (ZERO TO THREE, 2003).

**Infant–toddler educators who promote early literacy demonstrate the following observable skills:**

- L&L-3a** Frequently engage children in book exploration, storytelling, and reading activities
- L&L-3b** Point to pictures while labeling them, using facial expression, varied vocal tone, and gestures to communicate the meaning of words; reinforce the meaning of words by connecting them to real-life experiences at home and school
- L&L-3c** Promote positive attitudes toward books by making them available for children to explore independently, modeling shared and independent reading activities, rereading favorites, and modeling appropriate care for books
- L&L-3d** Offer children opportunities to turn the pages of books and choose the books that are read to them
- L&L-3e** Ask older infants and toddlers (18 months old and up) questions about the pictures or plot of the book, provide opportunities for children to complete predictable sentences or rhyming phrases while reading aloud, and make connections between the book and children's own lives, or familiar concepts, for example:
- *While reading Eric Carle's Very Hungry Caterpillar, let older toddlers point to and name out loud the fruit or other food items pictured or ask them if some of the food items in the story are things they like to eat at home or school*

**Infant–toddler educators who promote early literacy demonstrate the following observable skills (contd.):**

**L&L-3f** Provide many types of books including picture story books, participation books, patterned concept books, predictable books, wordless books, folktales and fables, poetry, nursery rhymes, alphabet books, counting books, rhyming books, and informational books

**L&L-3g** Share many forms of children’s literature including poems, songs, finger plays, and word play

**L&L-3h** Use songs to model rhyming and enhance predictive sequencing

**L&L-3i** Ensure that the book selection in the early childhood setting is inclusive of a variety of cultures and languages, and features characters with different abilities. Make books and music available in children’s home languages



### Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Building early literacy starts with the basics like reading to and sharing books with infants and toddlers and connecting real life events with those in the plots of favorite stories. Access to a variety of books and books with different purposes are all important to building a love of books and communicating the value of reading. When access to books and reading materials is limited in a child’s home, it is important to consider ways to extend book sharing and promoting reading across the school and home environments. Having multiple copies of favorite books so that one can be borrowed for use at home may help to ensure that all children have access to books

when they are not at school. Connecting families with local public libraries or creating a lending library are also great ways to help children from vulnerable populations have access to a variety of books in both home and early learning environments. In addition, promoting storytelling is a powerful form of literacy. Stories make up our everyday lives. They help us make meaning of our lives and are a good way to promote early literacy even when books are not readily available. Looking at family photos and telling stories about events in families’ lives is another great way to promote storytelling.



### Considerations for Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Pairing books with props so that children can touch and explore the objects that are being narrated in the story can be helpful to comprehension. Educators can also select books that have repetitive refrains (e.g., *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*) that allow children who are learning two or more languages at once to participate in the story and repeat the refrain as they hear it repeated through the book-sharing experience. Inviting parents or other family members to share stories, books, or songs in the family’s home language also promotes all children’s recognition of different cultures and allows multi-language learners to be the “expert” on their home languages. When using books, teachers can write the words in other languages

next to or above the word in the English books, especially books that have one word naming as text, such as “ball” or “car.” Family members can pass along literacy-building skills such as talking, singing, or playing rhyming games—all in their own languages. Teachers can also encourage parents to create a book for each member of their family, including extended relatives. Each family member can write their own story—how they grew up, what they like, and include some pictures. It’s a fun way to have books in other languages but to also make sure the children learn and teach others about their ancestors and cultural heritage.

**What does *promoting early literacy* look like In practice?**

Young Infants	Mobile Infants	Toddlers
<p>Carol knows that 5-month-old Joshua reads books with his mom every night before bed so when Joshua starts to show signs of fatigue, she asks him if he would like to hear a story and take a rest. Joshua raises his arms to Carol to indicate that he wants to join her. Carol and Joshua look at a favorite book that Joshua has at home as Carol reads the simple script and Joshua relaxes into this transition to sleep routine.</p>	<p>Eighteen-month-old Laquan loves the large book that contains real pictures of babies demonstrating different emotions. When Camila, his teacher, looks at the book with him she pauses at each page to point out the babies’ facial expressions and how they help predict what the babies are feeling. “Look, Laquan, this baby is sad, his mouth is open and turned down and he has tears coming down his cheeks. I wonder why he is sad.” She pauses and waits a minute. Then she says, “This sad baby reminds me of the story we read about Caillou’s baby sister. She cries in that book when she is hungry and tired. I wonder if this baby is hungry and tired. That might make him sad.”</p>	<p>Stacy, 28 months old, loves to act out the story <i>Going on a Bear Hunt</i>. Sonja knows this is her favorite and as she starts into the rhythmic and predictable story she waits for Stacy to join her in the story area of the classroom. Clapping her hands on her lap Sonja begins, “We’re going on a bear hunt, going to catch a big one...” and progresses to the tall grass in their path, “We can’t go over it, we can’t go under it, we can’t go around it, what shall we do?”</p> <p>She waits for Stacy’s response. Stacy sings, “We’ll have to go through it!” and together Stacy and Sonja use their hands and vocalizations to make the <i>swish, swish, swish</i> sound of tall grass.</p>

# Appendices

## Appendix I: Crosswalks

*ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant–Toddler Educators™* was developed to fill an identified gap in explicit teaching guidance for infant–toddler educators. ZERO TO THREE discussed specific gaps and the plan to address some of them within the *Critical Competencies* with partners that own related criteria for the early care and education and allied fields. These partners supported ZERO TO THREE’s goal of complementing existing infant–toddler educator efforts, including the related criteria they own. They generously agreed to review and confirm the relationships between the *Critical Competencies* and their related criteria.

- While related, our partners’ criteria are also unique in purpose, focus, level, and/or targeted professional.
- The crosswalk illustrates how these criteria can be used together to support the preparation and professional development of infant–toddler educators.

ZERO TO THREE would like to thank these partners again for their generosity of time and commitment to the shared vision of a well-supported early childhood workforce that supports young children’s optimal learning and development.

In this appendix, ZERO TO THREE also suggests alignment of the *Critical Competencies* with:

- selected infant–toddler/teacher observation tools in Crosswalk Table 2, as examples of how observation tools can help educators document their demonstration of critical skills
- the new Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015) in Crosswalk Table 3, as one example of the relationship between child outcomes and the critical teacher competencies that support children’s achievement of these developmental milestones

## Related Criteria

Crosswalk Table 1 outlines the relationship between *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™* with our partners' related professional criteria. The table provides a high-level crosswalk agreed upon by ZERO TO THREE and the owners of the listed criteria. Crosswalk Table 1 includes the following related criteria for the early care and education and allied fields:

- [National Association for the Education of Young Children's \(NAEYC\) Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation](#) (NAEYC, 2009)
- Council for Professional Recognition's [Child Development Associate \(CDA\) Credential™ competency standards](#) (n.d.)
- [Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health \(MI-AIMH\) Competency Guidelines® for Infant Family Associates](#) (2014)
- [Division for Early Childhood's \(DEC\) Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education](#) (2014)
- [WestEd's Program for Infant/Toddler Care \(PITC\) topics and objectives](#) (n.d.)
- Collaborative for Understanding the Pedagogy of Infant/Toddler Development's (CUPID) [Draft Competencies for the Infant/Toddler Workforce](#) (2015)
- [Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors](#) (n.d.)

**Crosswalk Table 1: Related Professional Criteria**

Related Criteria	<i>ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™</i> : Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<p><b>NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation</b></p> <p><i>Note: criteria relationships apply across all 3 areas of the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies</i></p>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p><i>Standard 4. Approaches to Teaching and Learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4a: Understanding positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation of their work with children</li> <li>• 4b: Knowing and understanding effective strategies and tools for early education</li> <li>• 4c: Using a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate teaching/learning approaches</li> <li>• 4d: Reflecting on their own practice to promote positive outcomes for each child</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b></p> <p><i>Standard 1. Promoting Child Development and Learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1a: Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs</li> <li>• 1b: Knowing and understanding the multiple influences on development and learning</li> <li>• 1c: Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments</li> </ul> <p><i>Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2a: Knowing about and understanding diverse family and community characteristics</li> <li>• 2b: Supporting and engaging families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships</li> <li>• 2c: Involving families and communities in their children's development and learning</li> </ul>		

(continued)

Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation</b> (contd.)	<p><i>Standard 3. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3a: Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment</li> <li>• 3b: Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches</li> <li>• 3c: Understanding and practicing responsible assessment to promote positive outcomes for each child</li> </ul> <p><i>Standard 5. Using Content Knowledge to Build Meaningful Curriculum</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5a: Understanding content knowledge and resources in academic disciplines</li> <li>• 5b: Knowing and using the central concepts, inquiry tools, and structures of content areas or academic disciplines</li> <li>• 5c: Using their own knowledge, appropriate early learning standards, and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curricula for each child</li> </ul>		

Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>CDA Credential™ competency standards (by knowledge areas)</b>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b>  <i>Subject Area 3: Supporting children’s social and emotional development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult modeling, self-esteem, self-regulation, socialization, cultural identity, conflict resolution</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b>  <i>Subject Area 1: Planning a safe, healthy learning environment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety, first aid, health, nutrition, space planning, materials and equipment, play</li> </ul> <p><i>Subject Area 2: Advancing children’s physical and intellectual development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large and small muscle, language and literacy, discovery, art, music, mathematics, social studies, science, technology, and dual language learning</li> </ul> <p><i>Subject Area 4: Building productive relationships with families</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent involvement, home visits, parent conferences, referrals, communication strategies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b>  <i>Subject Area 2: Advancing children’s physical and intellectual development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large and small muscle, language and literacy, discovery, art, music, mathematics, social studies, science, technology, and dual language learning</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b>  <i>Subject Area 1: Planning a safe, healthy learning environment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety, first aid, health, nutrition, space planning, materials and equipment, play</li> </ul> <p><i>Subject Area 3: Supporting children’s social and emotional development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult modeling, self-esteem, self-regulation, socialization, cultural identity, conflict resolution</li> </ul> <p><i>Subject Area 4: Building productive relationships with families</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent involvement, home visits, parent conferences, referrals, communication strategies</li> </ul> <p><i>Subject Area 7: Observing and recording children’s behavior</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tools and strategies for objective observation and assessment of children’s behavior and learning to plan curriculum and individualize teaching, developmental delays, intervention strategies, individual education plans</li> </ul> <p><i>Subject Area 8: Understanding principles of child development and learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typical developmental expectations for children from birth through age 5, individual variation including children with special needs, cultural influences on development</li> </ul>	

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Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>CDA Credential™ competency standards (by knowledge areas)</b> (contd.)	<p><i>Subject Area 7: Observing and recording children’s behavior</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tools and strategies for objective observation and assessment of children’s behavior and learning to plan curriculum and individualize teaching, developmental delays, intervention strategies, individual education plans</li> </ul> <p><i>Subject Area 8: Understanding principles of child development and learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typical developmental expectations for children from birth through age 5, individual variation including children with special needs, cultural influences on development</li> </ul>		

Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>MI-AIMH Competency Guidelines® for Infant Family Associate (Level 1)</b>  <i>Notes: Criteria relationships apply across all 3 areas of the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies. MI-AIMH demonstration statements are bulleted, followed by knowledge or skill areas in brackets.</i>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Direct Service Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses example, encouragement, and own life experience to: ... Create nurturing, stable infant/young child-care-giver relationships [Advocacy, Responding with Empathy]</li> <li>Provides direct care and teaching/developmental activities to children and families with multiple, complex risk factors to help ensure ... optimal development of the child in all domains (physical, emotional, cognitive) [Life Skills, Responding with Empathy]</li> <li>Participates in formal and informal assessments of the infant’s/young child’s development, in accordance with standard practice [Screening and Assessment]</li> <li>... Find pleasure in caring for their infants/young children [Life Skills]</li> </ul> <p><i>Theoretical Foundations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates awareness of conditions that optimize early infant brain development [Infant/Very Young Child Development and Behavior]</li> <li>Informally (and in some cases, formally) observes and assesses the infant/young child, parent, and parent-infant/young child relationship to identify landmarks of typical child development behavior and healthy, secure relationships [Relationship-Focused Practice; Attachment, Separation, Trauma, Grief and Loss]</li> <li>Applies understanding of cultural competence to communicate effectively, establish positive relationships with families, and demonstrate respect for the uniqueness of each client family’s culture [Cultural Competence]</li> </ul>		

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Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>MI-AIMH Competency Guidelines® for Infant Family Associate (Level 1)</b> (contd.)	<b>Additional related criteria:</b> <i>Communicating</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively listens to others; asks questions for clarification [Listening]</li> <li>Uses appropriate non-verbal behavior and correctly interprets others' non-verbal behavior [Listening, Speaking]</li> </ul> <i>Thinking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sees and can explain the “big picture” when analyzing situations [Analyzing Information]</li> <li>Sees and can explain the interactions of various factors [Maintaining Perspective]</li> <li>Considers difficult situations carefully [Exercises Sound Judgment]</li> <li>Evaluates alternatives prior to making decisions [Solving Problems]</li> <li>Generates new insights and workable solutions to issues related to effective relationship-based, family-centered care [Solving Problems]</li> <li>Defines, creates a sequence for, and prioritizes tasks necessary to perform role and meet the needs of families [Planning &amp; Organizing]</li> </ul> <i>Reflection</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remains open and curious [Curiosity]</li> <li>Keeps up-to-date on current and future trends in child development and relationship-based practice [Personal/ Professional Development]</li> <li>Uses reflective practice throughout work with infants/young children and families to understand own emotional response to infant/family work [Self Awareness]</li> </ul>		

Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/ Early Childhood Special Education*</b>  <i>Note: primary relationship to instruction criteria and additional related criteria (in the areas of assessment, environment, and family), apply across all 3 areas of the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies</i>	<b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Interaction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>INT1.</i> Practitioners promote the child’s social-emotional development by observing, interpreting, and responding contingently to the range of the child’s emotional expressions.</li> <li><i>INT2.</i> Practitioners promote the child’s social development by encouraging the child to initiate or sustain positive interactions with other children and adults during routines and activities through modeling, teaching, feedback, or other types of guided support.</li> </ul>	<b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Interaction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>INT4.</i> Practitioners promote the child’s cognitive development by observing, interpreting, and responding intentionally to the child’s exploration, play, and social activity by joining in and expanding on the child’s focus, actions, and intent.</li> <li><i>INT5.</i> Practitioners promote the child’s problem-solving behavior by observing, interpreting, and scaffolding in response to the child’s growing level of autonomy and self-regulation.</li> </ul>	<b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Interaction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>INT3.</i> Practitioners promote the child’s communication development by observing, interpreting, responding contingently, and providing natural consequences for the child’s verbal and non-verbal communication and by using language to label and expand on the child’s requests, needs, preferences, or interests.</li> </ul>

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Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<p><b>DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/ Early Childhood Special Education*</b> (contd.)</p>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p><i>Instruction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>INS1.</i> Practitioners, with the family, identify each child’s strengths, preferences, and interests to engage the child in active learning.</li> <li>• <i>INS2.</i> Practitioners, with the family, identify skills to target for instruction that help a child become adaptive, competent, socially connected, and engaged and that promote learning in natural and inclusive environments.</li> <li>• <i>INS3.</i> Practitioners gather and use data to inform decisions about individualized instruction.</li> <li>• <i>INS4.</i> Practitioners plan for and provide the level of support, accommodations, and adaptations needed for the child to access, participate, and learn within and across activities and routines.</li> <li>• <i>INS5.</i> Practitioners embed instruction within and across routines, activities, and environments to provide contextually relevant learning opportunities.</li> <li>• <i>INS6.</i> Practitioners use systematic instructional strategies with fidelity to teach skills and promote child engagement and learning.</li> <li>• <i>INS7.</i> Practitioners use explicit feedback and consequences to increase child engagement, play, and skills.</li> <li>• <i>INS8.</i> Practitioners use peer-mediated intervention to teach skills and to promote child engagement and learning.</li> <li>• <i>INS9.</i> Practitioners use functional assessment and related prevention, promotion, and intervention strategies across environments to prevent and address challenging behavior.</li> <li>• <i>INS10.</i> Practitioners implement the frequency, intensity, and duration of instruction needed to address the child’s phase and pace of learning or the level of support needed by the family to achieve the child’s outcomes or goals.</li> <li>• <i>INS11.</i> Practitioners provide instructional support for young children with disabilities who are dual language learners to assist them in learning English and in continuing to develop skills through the use of their home language.</li> <li>• <i>INS12.</i> Practitioners use and adapt specific instructional strategies that are effective for dual language learners when teaching English to children with disabilities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b></p> <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A3.</i> Practitioners use assessment materials and strategies that are appropriate for the child’s age and level of development and accommodate the child’s sensory, physical, communication, cultural, linguistic, social, and emotional characteristics.</li> <li>• <i>A4.</i> Practitioners conduct assessments that include all areas of development and behavior to learn about the child’s strengths, needs, preferences, and interests.</li> <li>• <i>A5.</i> Practitioners conduct assessments in the child’s dominant language and in additional languages if the child is learning more than one language.</li> <li>• <i>A6.</i> Practitioners use a variety of methods, including observation and interviews, to gather assessment information from multiple sources, including the child’s family and other significant individuals in the child’s life.</li> <li>• <i>A7.</i> Practitioners obtain information about the child’s skills in daily activities, routines, and environments such as home, center, and community.</li> <li>• <i>A9.</i> Practitioners implement systematic ongoing assessment to identify learning targets, plan activities, and monitor the child’s progress to revise instruction as needed.</li> </ul> <p><i>Environment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>E1.</i> Practitioners provide services and supports in natural and inclusive environments during daily routines and activities to promote the child’s access to and participation in learning experiences.</li> <li>• <i>E2.</i> Practitioners consider Universal Design for Learning principles to create accessible environments.</li> <li>• <i>E3.</i> Practitioners work with the family and other adults to modify and adapt the physical, social, and temporal environments to promote each child’s access to and participation in learning experiences.</li> </ul>		

(continued)

Related Criteria	<i>ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas</i>		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<p><b>DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/ Early Childhood Special Education*</b></p> <p>(contd.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>E4.</i> Practitioners work with families and other adults to identify each child’s needs for assistive technology to promote access to and participation in learning experiences.</li> <li>• <i>E5.</i> Practitioners work with families and other adults to acquire or create appropriate assistive technology to promote each child’s access to and participation in learning experiences.</li> <li>• <i>E6.</i> Practitioners create environments that provide opportunities for movement and regular physical activity to maintain or improve fitness, wellness, and development across domains.</li> </ul> <p><i>Family</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>F1.</i> Practitioners build trusting and respectful partnerships with the family through interactions that are sensitive and responsive to cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity.</li> <li>• <i>F3.</i> Practitioners are responsive to the family’s concerns, priorities, and changing life circumstances.</li> <li>• <i>F4.</i> Practitioners and the family work together to create outcomes or goals, develop individualized plans, and implement practices that address the family’s priorities and concerns and the child’s strengths and needs.</li> <li>• <i>F5.</i> Practitioners support family functioning, promote family confidence and competence, and strengthen family-child relationships by acting in ways that recognize and build on family strengths and capacities.</li> <li>• <i>F8.</i> Practitioners provide the family of a young child who has or is at risk for developmental delay/disability, and who is a dual language learner, with information about the benefits of learning in multiple languages for the child’s growth and development.</li> </ul>		

Related Criteria	<i>ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas</i>		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<p><b>The Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) module topics</b></p>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Module I: Social-Emotional Growth and Socialization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophical Foundations</li> <li>• Guidance and Discipline with Infants and Toddlers in Group Care</li> <li>• Understanding Children’s Behavior: Supporting the Individual Needs of Infants and Toddlers</li> <li>• Temperament: A Practical Approach to Meeting Individual Needs</li> <li>• Social-Emotional Milestones, Responsive Caregiving, and Identity</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Module I: Social-Emotional Growth and Socialization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance and Discipline with Infants and Toddlers in Group Care</li> <li>• Understanding Children’s Behavior: Supporting the Individual Needs of Infants and Toddlers</li> </ul> <p><i>Module II: Group Care</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environments for Group Care</li> <li>• More than Just Routine</li> <li>• Making It Happen: Small Groups and Individualized Care</li> <li>• Respectful Care</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Module I: Social-Emotional Growth and Socialization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophical Foundations</li> <li>• Guidance and Discipline with Infants and Toddlers in Group Care</li> <li>• Understanding Children’s Behavior: Supporting the Individual Needs of Infants and Toddlers</li> <li>• Temperament: A Practical Approach to Meeting Individual Needs</li> </ul>

(continued)

Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<p><b>The Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) module topics</b> (contd.)</p>	<p><i>Module II: Group Care</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Philosophical Foundations</li> <li>Environments for Group Care</li> <li>More than Just Routine</li> <li>Making It Happen: Small Groups and Individualized Care</li> <li>Exploring Primary Caregiving and Continuity of Care</li> <li>Respectful Care</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b></p> <p><i>Module III: Learning and Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitating Learning in Infants</li> <li>Brain Development in Infants and Toddlers</li> <li>Discoveries of Infancy</li> <li>Special Needs</li> <li>Language Development, Communication and Culture</li> </ul> <p><i>Module IV: Culture, Family, and Providers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essential Connections: Ten Keys to Culturally Sensitive Child Care</li> <li>Harmonizing Cultural Diversity for Sensitive Infant Care</li> <li>Acknowledge, Ask, Adapt</li> </ul>	<p><i>Module III: Learning and Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitating Learning in Infants</li> <li>Brain Development in Infants and Toddlers</li> <li>Discoveries of Infancy</li> <li>Special Needs</li> <li>Language Development, Communication and Culture</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b></p> <p><i>Module IV: Culture, Family, and Providers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essential Connections: Ten Keys to Culturally Sensitive Child Care</li> <li>Harmonizing Cultural Diversity for Sensitive Infant Care</li> <li>Acknowledge, Ask, Adapt</li> </ul>	<p><i>Module II: Group Care</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Philosophical Foundations</li> <li>Environments for Group Care</li> <li>More than Just Routine</li> <li>Making It Happen: Small Groups and Individualized Care</li> <li>Exploring Primary Caregiving and Continuity of Care</li> <li>Respectful Care</li> </ul> <p><i>Module III: Learning and Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitating Learning in Infants</li> <li>Brain Development in Infants and Toddlers</li> <li>Discoveries of Infancy</li> <li>Special Needs</li> <li>Language Development, Communication and Culture</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b></p> <p><i>Module IV: Culture, Family, and Providers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essential Connections: Ten Keys to Culturally Sensitive Child Care</li> <li>Harmonizing Cultural Diversity for Sensitive Infant Care</li> <li>Acknowledge, Ask, Adapt</li> </ul>

Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<p><b>Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors</b></p> <p><i>Note: Criteria relationships apply across all 3 areas of the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies</i></p>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p><i>Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development</li> </ul> <p><i>Social-Emotional Competence of Children</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and establish and maintain relationships</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b></p> <p><i>Social Connections</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support</li> </ul> <p><i>Concrete Support in Times of Need</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to concrete support and services that address a family’s needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges</li> </ul>		

Related Criteria	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<p><b>CUPID’s Draft Competencies for the Infant/Toddler Workforce</b></p> <p><i>Note: most of the criteria relationships apply across all 3 areas of the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies (row 1 to the right); additional primary relationships between the Supporting Social-Emotional Development area and CUPID’s draft criteria are also listed (row 2 to the right)</i></p>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b>  <i>Understanding &amp; Supporting Learning</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Interactions:</i> engage in Intentional interactions to scaffold development; create individualized experiences that respond to children’s interests, needs, developmental levels</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related criteria:</b>  <i>Health &amp; Safety</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Creating environments and structures:</i> creating an environment that balances safety and exploration</li> </ul> <p><i>Reflectiveness: Reflection on Child/Other</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Interactions:</i> pausing reaction to others; observing, reflecting, and translating reflections into changes in how you plan and respond [to] interactions/experiences</li> </ul> <p><i>Understanding &amp; Supporting Relationships</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Interactions:</i> warm and sensitive/responsive interactions; respectful interactions</li> </ul> <p><i>Child Guidance</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Interactions:</i> observing child carefully; accurately interpreting the child’s cues and goals; speaking for the baby (reflection on behavior and internal states); effective encouragement; modeling the desired behavior; build on emerging child competencies</li> </ul> <p><i>Assessing Development, Learning, &amp; Environments</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Creating environments and structures:</i> linking information from environmental assessments to assessments of child behavior, learning, and development; using assessment information to individualize and modify [and] improve environments and curricula</li> </ul> <p><i>Diversity &amp; Inclusion</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Creating environments and structures:</i> create a representative/inclusive and accessible environment through materials, written and oral communication, and environmental displays; ability to observe individual children carefully to learn their specific needs; ability to individualize materials and environments to specific learning needs; develop scaffolds that meet the physical, cognitive, social, and linguistic supports the child needs to interact with and learn from the environment</li> </ul>		
	<p><b>Supporting Social–Emotional Development</b></p> <p><b>Primary relationship to:</b>  <i>Understanding &amp; Supporting Relationships</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Interactions:</i> creating opportunities for child to contribute to relationship; observing children’s unique contributions to relationships and creating opportunities to expand on those</li> </ul> <p><i>Child Guidance</i>, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skills: Creating environments and structures:</i> positive guidance skills begin with setting up environment[s] and routines to reduce challenging behaviors</li> <li>• <i>Skills: Interactions:</i> scaffolding emotion regulation</li> </ul>		

### Crosswalk Table 1 Sources:

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### Additional Notes:

In consultation with our partners, the authors chose to use the DEC *Recommended Practices* for this crosswalk because these practices offer a similar level of specific guidance to practitioners about the most effective ways to improve the learning outcomes and promote the development of young children who have, or are at-risk for, developmental delays or disabilities. It is important to note that the Council on Exceptional Children (CEC) has developed Personnel Standards to guide the recognition of special education preparation programs at Institutions of Higher Education. In addition, all professional preparation programs in early intervention/early childhood special education must use the DEC Early Childhood Specialty Set Personnel Standards in conjunction with the CEC Standards. The DEC Recommended Practices support the CEC and DEC Standards, and can be used by individuals working across a variety of early childhood settings with young children who have or are at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities. More information about the CEC Standards is available at [www.cec.sped.org/Standards/Special-Educator-Professional-Preparation/CEC-Initial-and-Advanced-Preparation-Standards](http://www.cec.sped.org/Standards/Special-Educator-Professional-Preparation/CEC-Initial-and-Advanced-Preparation-Standards); more information about the DEC standards and the DEC Recommended Practices is available at [www.dec-sped.org/](http://www.dec-sped.org/).

## Observation Tools

Crosswalk Table 2 outlines ZERO TO THREE’s suggested alignment of the *Critical Competencies* with the following selected infant–toddler/teacher observation tools:

- [Quality of Caregiver-Child Interaction for Infants and Toddlers](#) (Q-CCIIT) draft indicators (Atkins-Burnett et al., 2015)
- [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS®\)](#) tool for infants (Hamre et al., 2014)
- [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS®\)](#) tool for toddlers (La Paro et al., 2014)
- Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale–Revised Edition (ITERS-R; Harms et al., 2006)

*Crosswalk Table 2: Observation Tools*

Observational Tool	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>Quality of Caregiver-Child Interactions with Infants and Toddlers (Q-CCIIT) DRAFT dimensions and items</b>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p><i>A. Support for Social Emotional Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding Contingently to Social Cues</li> <li>• Responding to Emotional Cues</li> <li>• Builds a Positive Relationship</li> <li>• Supporting Peer Interaction/ Play</li> </ul> <p><i>D. [Items applied across all areas]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervises or Joins in Play and Activities</li> <li>• Responsive Routines</li> <li>• Sense of Belonging</li> <li>• Responding Contingently to Distress</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related dimensions or items:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving Choices</li> <li>• Support for Social Problem Solving Among Peers</li> <li>• Classroom Limits and Management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p><i>B. Support for Cognitive Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting Object Exploration</li> <li>• Scaffolding Problem Solving</li> </ul> <p><i>C. Support for Language Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caregiver Use of Varied Vocabulary</li> <li>• Use of Questions</li> </ul> <p><i>D. [Items applied across all areas]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extending Pretend Play</li> <li>• Explicit Teaching</li> <li>• Features of Talk</li> <li>• Talk About Things Not Present</li> <li>• Supervises or Joins in Play and Activities</li> </ul> <p><i>Other Items Coded:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic Concepts</li> <li>• Types of Talk</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related dimensions or items:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting Peer Interaction/ Play</li> <li>• Giving Choices</li> <li>• Support for Social Problem Solving Among Peers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p><i>C. Support for Language Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caregiver Use of Varied Vocabulary</li> <li>• Use of Questions</li> <li>• Conversational Turn-Taking</li> <li>• Extending Children’s Language Use</li> <li>• Engaging Children in Books</li> <li>• Variety of Words (in books)</li> <li>• Variety of Types of Sentences (in books)</li> </ul> <p><i>D. [Items applied across all areas]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features of Talk</li> <li>• Positive Attitude Toward Books</li> </ul> <p><i>Other Items Coded:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of Talk</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related dimensions or items:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extending Pretend Play</li> <li>• Explicit Teaching</li> <li>• Talk About Things Not Present</li> <li>• Supervises or Joins in Play and Activities</li> </ul>

Observational Tool	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>CLASS - Infant</b>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Teacher Sensitivity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness and cue detection</li> <li>Responsiveness</li> <li>Infant Comfort</li> </ul> <p><i>Relational climate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relational behaviors</li> <li>Emotion expression</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Related Domains/Dimensions:</b> <i>Relational climate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respect for infants' state</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Facilitated Exploration</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involvement</li> <li>Infant focused</li> <li>Expansion of infants' experience</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Early Language Support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher talk</li> <li>Communication support</li> <li>Communication extension</li> </ul>

Observational Tool	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>CLASS - Toddler</b>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Positive Climate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships</li> <li>Positive affect</li> <li>Respect</li> </ul> <p><i>Teacher Sensitivity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness</li> <li>Responsiveness</li> <li>Child Comfort</li> </ul> <p><i>Behavior Guidance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactive</li> <li>Supporting positive behavior</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Related Domains/Dimensions:</b> <i>Regard for Child Perspectives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility</li> <li>Support for independence</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Facilitation of Learning and Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active facilitation</li> <li>Expansion of cognition</li> </ul> <p><i>Quality of Feedback</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scaffolding</li> <li>Providing information</li> <li>Encouragement and affirmation</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Related Domains/Dimensions:</b> <i>Regard for Child Perspectives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child focus</li> <li>Support for independence</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Language Modeling</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting language use</li> <li>Repetition and extension</li> <li>Self- and parallel talk</li> <li>Advanced language</li> </ul>

Observational Tool	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social-Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
ITERS-R	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Interaction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff-child interaction</li> <li>• Peer interaction</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Related Subscales/Items:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Promoting acceptance of diversity</li> </ul> <p><i>Program Structure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group play activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Interaction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff-child interaction</li> <li>• Peer interaction</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Related Subscales/Items:</b></p> <p><i>Interaction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision of play and learning</li> </ul> <p><i>Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several items within this subscale are related</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b> <i>Listening and Talking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping children understand language</li> <li>• Helping children use language</li> <li>• Using books</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Related Subscales/Items:</b></p> <p><i>Interaction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff-child interaction</li> </ul>

**Crosswalk Table 2 Sources:**

Atkins-Burnett, S., Monahan, S., Tarullo, L., Xue, Y., Cavadel, E., Malone, L., & Akers, L. (2015). *Measuring the Quality of Caregiver-Child Interactions for Infants and Toddlers (Q-CCIIT)*. OPRE Report 2015-13. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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## Child Outcomes

Crosswalk Table 3 outlines ZERO TO THREE’s suggested alignment of the *Critical Competencies* with the infant–toddler portion of the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

**Crosswalk Table 3: Child Outcomes**

Child Outcomes Document	ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™: Areas		
	Supporting Social–Emotional Development	Supporting Cognitive Development	Supporting Language and Literacy Development
<b>Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework</b>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p>1. <i>Approaches to Learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation</li> <li>Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)</li> </ul> <p>2. <i>Social and Emotional Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships with Adults</li> <li>Relationships with Other Children</li> <li>Emotional Functioning</li> <li>Sense of Identity and Belonging</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related outcomes:</b></p> <p>4. <i>Cognition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiative and Curiosity</li> <li>Reasoning and Problem Solving</li> </ul> <p>5. <i>Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perception</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p>1. <i>Approaches to Learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)</li> <li>Initiative and Curiosity</li> <li>Creativity</li> </ul> <p>4. <i>Cognition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploration and Discovery</li> <li>Memory</li> <li>Reasoning and Problem Solving</li> <li>Emergent Mathematical Thinking</li> <li>Imitation and Symbolic Representation and Play</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related outcomes:</b></p> <p>2. <i>Social and Emotional Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional Functioning</li> </ul> <p>5. <i>Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perception</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary relationship to:</b></p> <p>3. <i>Language and Communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attending and Understanding</li> <li>Communicating and Speaking</li> <li>Vocabulary</li> <li>Emergent Literacy</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional related outcomes:</b></p> <p>4. <i>Cognition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploration and Discovery</li> <li>Emergent Mathematical Thinking</li> </ul>

### Crosswalk Table 3 Source:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. (2015). *Head Start early learning outcomes framework: Ages birth to five*. Author: Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/sr/approach/pdf/ohs-framework.pdf>.

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## Appendix III: ZERO TO THREE's Implementation Services

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### ZERO TO THREE's Workforce Innovations

ZERO TO THREE's Workforce Innovations team can help your organization use the *Critical Competencies* to analyze your existing workforce supports and target professional development priorities that are strategic and aligned with your workforce goals. Our team of technical assistance experts use their diverse and extensive experience to take an innovative approach that:

- centers on who your workforce members are and their professional needs;
- is grounded in research, including implementation science to support system efficiency, accountability, and fidelity; and
- offers a global perspective while honoring your unique context.

#### **Examples of our services include the following:**

- Presentations for your key stakeholders to help raise awareness about the essential skills and abilities of the infant–toddler workforce
- Self-assessments to inform individual and program-/community-/statewide professional development planning
- Strengths and gaps analysis of your existing professional development offerings for infant–toddler educators
- Recommendations of professional development system strategies and policy tailored to your state/community requirements and context
- Support for leadership, coaching, and training skills for system leaders, professional development providers, and infant–toddler specialists
- Facilitated strategic planning; stakeholder, workgroup, committee/subcommittee meetings and work; learning communities and communities of practice
- Professional learning content that meets crucial gaps for the infant–toddler workforce with multiple delivery options

For more information about *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators™*, related technical assistance services, and professional development opportunities, visit [www.zerotothree.org/CriticalCompetencies](http://www.zerotothree.org/CriticalCompetencies) or contact [workforce@zerotothree.org](mailto:workforce@zerotothree.org).