

2006

INFANT & TODDLER PROGRAMS: THE WORKFORCE

Better Trained Teachers = Healthy Development

Many children under the age of three now spend up to ten hours a day in child care settings. During this time, their brains grow rapidly, setting down lifelong patterns for social, emotional, physical, and intellectual growth. Their first teachers exert enormous influence on that growth.



Prepared by Child Care, Inc., based on national research and recommendations, as well as surveys of the New York City Infant & Toddler workforce.



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Quality Infant & Toddler Care:

VITAL TO CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Children's earliest experiences set the stage for school success and adult productivity. In the first three years of life, the brain grows at breakneck speed, creating more than a trillion pathways for learning and development. By the age of three, 85 percent of the brain's capacity is in place, creating the ability to speak, learn, and reason. Early experiences also influence lifelong habits of learning and social behavior as well as the trajectory of emotional and physical growth.

Parents are their children's first and primary teachers, but today half of all mothers are back on the job within a year of giving birth. Thus, many infants and toddlers now depend on other adult caregivers for their first lessons in everything from language to coping with frustration. National studies show that 39 percent of infants and toddlers spend more than 35 hours a week in care.

Research shows babies and toddlers learn in the context of relationships with adults and do best with adults who are sensitive and respond to their needs. The research also shows that adults who have a background in child development tend to create

the most positive relationships with babies. In addition, it's important that adults caring for children under the age of three have specialized training in the health and safety issues related to very young children. In particular, studies show babies thrive in the care of adults familiar with the key developmental milestones, the best practices related to prevention of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and methods that encourage language, literacy, and intellectual curiosity. With such a background, the adults are more likely to create a safe environment, promote learning, spot developmental delays, and help families find intervention to prevent long-term disabilities.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that caregivers should have at least 30 hours of continuing education in their first year of employment with 16 hours focused on child development and 14 in safety and child health. ZERO TO THREE, the nation's foremost authority on infant and toddler development, similarly recommends that all teachers in infant & toddler programs have specialized education and training on the needs of children under the age of three.

NEW YORK CITY'S INFANT & TODDLER REGULATORY STANDARDS LAG BEHIND THE REST OF NEW YORK STATE

As parents learn more about the importance of early development and education, many more seek to place their babies and toddlers in centers. Yet New York City's standards for staff in centers with infant & toddler programs fail to meet those proposed by national experts. The City's standards also compare poorly with those now enforced in the rest of New York State.

A lead teacher in New York City, for example, needs only a GED to start working. Elsewhere in New York State, teachers must have specialized training and experience in infant & toddler development.

Current Standards for Lead Teachers Working With Babies and Toddlers*

	PRESERVICE	INSERVICE	HEALTH & SAFETY	MINIMUM EDUCATION
City	none	none	none	G.E.D.
State	1 year	15 hours**		CDA***
AAP****		30 hours	14 hours	

*Regulations that govern the training of lead teachers in programs serving children from six weeks to two years old.

**The state calls for 30 hours in the first two years.

***Child Development Associate certificate or equivalent, such as Associate's Degree in early childhood or 9 college credits in early childhood education.

****American Academy of Pediatrics

*"Good infant care is neither babysitting nor preschool.
It is a special kind of care that resembles no other."*

— Program for Infant & Toddler Caregivers

Quality Infant & Toddler Care:

A FRAMEWORK FOR REGULATORY CHANGE

TRAINING AND EDUCATION CAN LIFT QUALITY; TEACHERS AND DIRECTORS ARE EAGER TO LEARN

Recent surveys show that targeted training and mentoring can significantly improve the quality of care for babies and toddlers in center-based programs. After in-depth technical assistance, which included observations, assessments, and training at programs in New York City, center directors reported that staff had better skills for dealing with behavior issues and gained a better knowledge of:

- Changes in practices to make programs more responsive to individual children's needs,
- Health and safety issues that arise with children under the age of three, especially SIDS and control of infectious disease,
- How to set up the classroom,
- How emotional, social, and intellectual skills emerge,
- Strategies to foster language development, and
- Assessment tools to improve classroom environment and instruction.

Overall, teachers who received training translated what they learned into immediate, concrete gains for children in their care. They learned how to control the spread of disease, recognize potential developmental delays, and create a developmentally-appropriate environment that encourages learning and literacy.

CURRENT STAFF REQUIREMENTS REFLECT CITY'S LOW REGULATORY STANDARDS

The City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene regulates center-based programs serving several thousand children under the age of two. Demand for such center-based care is growing, which makes it all the more critical for the City to lift the bar for staff qualifications in all programs serving very young children.

The City's current regulations for infant & toddler programs do not require staff to seek specialized training. The impact of such low requirements on practice is clear. In a recent survey of 140 infant-toddler programs, Child Care, Inc. found:

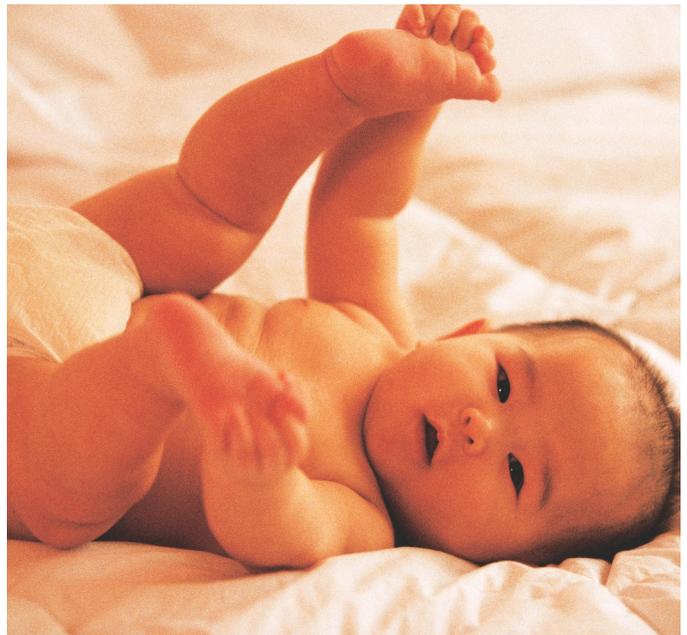
- 42 percent required lead teachers to have only a high school diploma or GED,
- Few required any preservice training or educational preparation geared toward meeting the specific needs of infants and toddlers.

LACK OF TRAINING = LACK OF QUALITY CARE

Through its work with infant & toddler programs across the city, the Infant & Toddler Technical Assistance Resource Center found a direct link between existing regulatory standards and an under-trained workforce. The center, a joint venture created by the City's five child care resource and referral agencies*, provides training and technical assistance to programs serving children under the age of three. The Resource Center found that a vast majority of staff needed more information and training on how to meet health and safety standards:

- Most lacked knowledge of basic hand-washing procedures, for example, a simple, but key practice known to control the spread of infectious disease in programs serving children under the age of three.
- In addition, many staff lacked knowledge of infant-toddler development, early literacy and the importance of responsive caregiving.

**The Resource Center is a program of the New York City Child Care Resource and Referral Consortium. Members include Child Care, Inc., Child Development Support Corporation, Chinese-American Planning Council, Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, and the Day Care Council of New York, Inc.*



“Positive relationships with caring adults will actually allow a child’s brain to grow and develop in the best possible way.”

— Foundation for Early Learning

Taking a Step Toward Quality:

REVISE REGULATIONS, PROVIDE TRAINING AND SUPPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a first and critical step, New York City should bring its standards in line with those elsewhere in New York State:

IMPROVE TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

All lead teachers should have at least a CDA with an emphasis on infant & toddler development or, alternatively, an Associate Degree in Early Childhood, child development or related field, or nine college credits in early childhood or related fields. In addition, the teacher must have two years experience in caring for children, which includes at least one year of specific training in infant and toddler care. Current staff should be given a minimum of two years to meet these higher standards.

EXPAND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Require all classroom staff to have 15 hours of training **on health and safety** within the first six months of employment and require continuing in-service training of 30 hours every two years. Training should address key topics in infant & toddler development, such as early language development, health and safety concerns related to children under the age of three, and best practices to foster healthy socio-emotional development among other topics.

EXPAND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Make more technical support and training available to infant & toddler programs using nationally-recognized assessment tools that encourage continuous improvements in the quality of services.

SUMMARY

Collectively, these changes represent an important next step in ensuring that all staff working with babies and toddlers have a basic understanding of child development, and health and safety, which is essential to promoting the healthy development of young children during the critical first three years of life.

ABOUT CHILD CARE, INC.

Child Care, Inc. seeks to make high quality early care and education a reality for every child in New York City. As one of the moving forces behind the creation of the city's Infant & Toddler Technical Assistance Resource Center, Child Care, Inc. has served as a catalyst and leader in improving services for children under the age of three.

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