

# Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Preschool

Preschool children are engaged by playful learning experiences and learning routines that make them feel safe, valued, and important. This book focuses on the unique joys, needs, challenges, and opportunities that occur in working with children ages 3 to 5. It shares ideas and key concepts outlined in the position statement on developmentally appropriate practice through a preschool lens.

Often, teachers feel ongoing pressure to prepare preschoolers for elementary school by focusing on academic skills. This limits opportunities for play, joy, and supporting preschoolers' physical, social, and emotional needs. In contrast, the chapters in this book present practical ideas and strategies from a variety of programs that honor the ways preschoolers learn. By showing developmentally appropriate practice in action, this book models practices that preschool educators can adapt to use in their own programs to enhance learning.

Each of the six parts of this book highlights one of the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice. In each part, you'll find chapters from teachers like you who are working toward developmentally appropriate practice every day. These chapters have been carefully selected to reflect various aspects of the guidelines, including equity, inclusion, and instruction that is culturally responsive. The educators featured in the chapters have successfully implemented or strive to implement various components of the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms. Although these chapters don't cover every topic in the position statement on developmentally appropriate practice, you'll find many ideas and strategies that you can integrate into your work as you support children and their families.

The introduction to each part discusses the guideline addressed in that part and includes overviews of each chapter. While the practices described in each chapter work well for the children in those particular settings, remember that developmentally appropriate practice is not a scripted, one-size-fits-all approach to

early learning. Instead, use the chapters to reflect on the practices and approaches that could be effective with the preschoolers you work with. Be inspired to think about ways you create goals and experiences that fit who and where the children are and that are challenging enough to promote their progress and interests.

Each chapter includes sidebars (identified by an icon) that connect to one of the position statements on developmentally appropriate practice and advancing equity. Focusing on a certain aspect of developmentally appropriate practice and equity, these sidebars are intended to support your reflection on how that aspect relates to the chapter.

Throughout the book, we note the use of the principles in action to illustrate how preschool educators can apply what is known about child development and learning to actual classroom practice. You will, however, want to spend some time reading more about the principles in the fourth edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*. This will give you a richer understanding of child development and how you can best nurture and support children.

**Part 1: Creating a Caring, Equitable Community of Learners** illustrates ways preschool educators can build a supportive learning community—a classroom that provides a physical, emotional, and cognitive environment that is appropriate for the development and learning of each child. This environment is built on consistent, positive, caring relationships between teachers, children, and families. The chapters in this section describe how you can develop this community through your daily routines, practices, and actions. They highlight the need to recognize children's strengths as you help them develop identity, purpose, and agency. They remind you to consider children's developmental levels as you provide support that will guide children's interactions and help them gain language and self-regulation skills.

**Part 2: Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections** demonstrates the opportunities preschool educators create to welcome families as collaborative partners and first teachers for children’s development and learning. The chapters in this section provide examples of ways to involve families in daily learning experiences, learn about your program’s community so you get to know children and families better, and understand families’ funds of knowledge to strengthen your curriculum and foster children’s success.

**Part 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children’s Development and Learning** illustrates the process of authentic assessment in preschool. Assessment methods that are appropriate for young children are tied to the activities and daily routines they engage in. They include observation, anecdotal note taking, children’s work samples, and Learning Stories (see Chapter 16). Appropriate assessment also includes the awareness of your own explicit and implicit bias and how these can affect your perception of children’s capabilities. The chapters in Part 3 focus on assessment tools that are tied to what children are actually doing and learning in the classroom. With an understanding of where children are, you can plan curriculum and implement learning experiences that build on children’s current knowledge to further their learning. The authors of these chapters urge you to consider children’s developmental and linguistic levels but also their individual experiences and family contexts when choosing assessment tools and interpreting the outcomes.

**Part 4: Teaching to Enhance Each Child’s Development and Learning** discusses approaches and techniques that preschool teachers use to engage children in joyful, relevant, and appropriately challenging lessons across learning domains. In the chapters in Part 4, you’ll see creative, supportive ways teachers make learning relevant to preschoolers’ needs and identities to support their physical, academic, social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic growth.

**Part 5: Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to Achieve Meaningful Goals** highlights teachers’ curriculum choices that have made meaningful connections with the children in their settings. You’ll read about teachers integrating learning to target social justice aims. You’ll also

see how educators have expanded their program’s curricula to be more responsive to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children and their communities. The chapters in Part 5 demonstrate making goal-oriented, relevant curricular choices for preschoolers.

**Part 6: Demonstrating Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator** suggests steps that preschool educators can take to improve their practice, advocate for children and families, and represent the dignity and importance of the profession. The chapters in the section discuss ways for you to reflect on your practice to better meet the needs of children and families. They also emphasize your responsibility to advocate for equitable, child-centered practices as you support other preschool educators.

Although the guidelines are addressed in separate parts, you will find common themes across the six parts. This is because children are whole beings. They arrive at our doors with individual experiences that have shaped their development. They are members of families and communities that carry multiple social identities. While you are developing two-way partnerships with families, you are also building a caring, equitable community of learners. As you use authentic assessments that capture what children know and can do, you are also teaching to enhance each child’s development. As you include family members in setting goals for their children and making curricular decisions, you are demonstrating professionalism. The guidelines work together to support your use of developmentally appropriate practice.

We would be remiss if we did not stress the critical role of reflection in your daily practice. As you read and reread these chapters, use the reflection questions in each part’s introduction to engage in conversations with colleagues and families. Consider how your work is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for each child in your learning environment. In what areas do you excel? What areas can be improved? As a lifelong learner, use the many tools and resources NAEYC offers and encourage others to do the same so that you support each and every child to achieve their full potential. (Visit [NAEYC.org/dap-focus-preschool](http://NAEYC.org/dap-focus-preschool) for additional material related to this book.)