



Promoting the inclusion of infants and young children with disabilities in child care

Participant Module

Family Day Care Homes: Natural Environments as a Teaching Tool



Philadelphia Inclusion Network a program of
Child and Family Studies Research Programs at
Thomas Jefferson University
130 S. 9th Street, 5th floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107
cfsrp@jefferson.edu
<http://jeffline.tju.edu/cfsrp>

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Session: Natural Environments as a Teaching Tool

OVERVIEW

What this workshop should accomplish:

Home-based caregivers provide care for infants and children of different ages in group sizes that may increase or decrease at different times during the day -- or on different days. While center-based child care is organized around specific activities and classroom routines for children of the same approximate age, home-based care promotes children's learning through natural routines and activities.

In this session, participants will learn to identify routines and activities in their home-based settings. Some of these routines/activities will be going well and some may not be occurring as smoothly as caregivers would like. Participants will learn strategies for improving those routines or activities that are not going well and for using those that are successful as contexts for children's learning. Participants will learn, also, how to develop successful learning activities for children of all ages and how to fit those activities into their typical daily routines.

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From this session, participants should gain understanding about:

- i Identifying and scheduling daily routines and activities;
- i Describe ways to use adaptations and other strategies to improve routines that are difficult or not going well; and
- i Identify ways to turn naturally-occurring routines and activities into learning opportunities.

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BACKGROUND

Family care providers have many opportunities for children to learn naturally. Many families choose home-based child care because the type of care provided for children is more like what children might experience in their own homes and is not as structured as the type of care provided in centers. In center-based care, children, generally of the same age, spend time together in activities that are designed to be interesting to the children and to teach them to learn specific information and skills. In home-based care, children are seldom the same age so that designing activities that are interesting to a same-aged group of children is not possible. Rather, home-based providers can use naturally occurring activities, as well as those that are specifically created, to provide a context in which children of different ages can learn and participate as is appropriate for each child's interests, abilities, and chronological age.

There are many places in home-based child care where children can learn. Different activities naturally occur in different rooms of the house such as the kitchen, playroom, bathroom. The outside provides other opportunities through activities such as doing errands, walking in the neighborhood, playing outside in the yard or at a playground, or visiting a museum or a local library. Each of these places where children spend time provide opportunities for teaching and learning.

Most caregivers establish routines when caring for groups of children. A primary way of creating routines is to design a

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schedule of what will happen during the day. In center-based care, schedules are likely to be the same each day, including activities such as snack, storytime, or arts and crafts. In home-based care, routines may be different each day depending on what is happening. For example, at 11:30 each morning, a caregiver may walk with other children to a local school to meet the children who are enrolled in half-day kindergarten, a routine that is different when schools have holidays. Or, all children may go to the local library once a week where the toddlers may participate in story hour while the preschoolers spend time in the Children’s Section with the caregiver.

Mattie has been caring for children in her home for five years. Most of the children come from the local neighborhood so Mattie knows their families. Most of the children arrive at Mattie’s house each day between 7 and 9 am. But, some days Shafik does not get there until noon because his mother works different shifts, and she likes for him to stay at home with her when he can. By 9 am, Mattie needs to leave the house to take Keira, Tomas, and Jonathan to school. All three attend the elementary school which is two blocks away from the house. On their fall morning walks to school, Mattie has the children stop and collect leaves, acorns from an old oak tree, and flowers. Shafik, at four years old is really interested in the outside so Mattie figures she can turn this activity into a “science center.” While walking home, she and the children try to find as many different leaves as they can -- right in their own neighborhood. When the children get home, the baby will be ready for her nap, leaving Mattie to read a story about trees and another one about the fall season for Shafik, Alan, and Samelya. The fall story is a story about Mr. Tree and will

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allow the children to “act out” being trees while listening to the story. After story, she is thinking that the children can help make their lunchtime sandwiches, cutting bread into the shapes of leaves and acorns using some cookie cutters. She has cream cheese and peanut butter so that they can “decorate” their sandwiches like the fall leaves they have seen on their walk to school.

Mattie has learned how to use the typical routines of home-based care to teach children about their environment and about science – their first “botany lesson.” Her primary goals are for the children to learn information about the fall season and about trees. However, she knows that Alan will get lots of practice using his hands and improving his coordination and that Samelya will have the opportunity to sit and listen during the story. Both Samelya and Shafik are four-year old talkers and will have lots of opportunities to express themselves in discussing the walk, story, and art/lunch activity.

Curriculum for Home-Based (Family)

Child Care:

There are few published curricula guides for providers of in-home child care although, in recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on providing more than “child care” for children who are cared for in this type of child care setting (e.g., Kontos, 1992; 1994; Kontos, Howes, Shinn, & Galinsky, 1994). To a certain extent, this emphasis on the quality of family home-based care has been translated by home care providers and others to mean that opportunities for learning need to be more structured and organized than what would

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occur if children were being cared for in their own homes. In-home care providers are encouraged to plan and organize specific activities for children and to set up play areas in their homes that resemble those found in child care centers (Dodge, Koralek, & Foulks, 1994).

The *Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care* (Dodge & Colker, 1991; 1992) is the most widely used curriculum for in-home care. This curriculum is based on helping care providers define a philosophy of care and develop a plan for managing both time (scheduling) and place (physical environment). Time is divided between care activities (e.g., eating breakfast; napping) and more structured play and learning activities. Care providers are encouraged to divide time into blocks such as early morning or late afternoon with structured play and learning activities taking place in mid-morning (i.e., morning activities) and mid-afternoon (afternoon activities). The second part of the curriculum provides examples of many activities within a variety of categories (e.g., dramatic play) that can be drawn upon and used as by in-home providers during morning and afternoon activities. This session emphasizes ways that in-home care providers can use naturally-occurring routines and activities as contexts for teaching and learning. Too often, the routines of family care are represented as having only a caregiving function and as “separate” from recommended planned and organized activity sessions. Maximizing opportunities for teaching and learning during routines allows child care providers to capitalize on children’s interests and to integrate structured opportunities for play and learning with what children are learning through participation in day-to-day routines and activities.

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Routines As A Context for Teaching and Learning:

Routines and natural activities occur within physical settings. For example, eating is most likely to occur within a home setting, outside in the yard, in a variety of types of restaurants, in a relative or neighbor's house, at church, etc. Playing on a jungle gym is most likely to occur at a playground, in the backyard, in a fast-food playground (such as McDonald's or Burger King), or at a structured recreation program. Settings provide the context for different types of routines and activities. Center-based child care is a setting that may include an outside playground and several internal settings (such as an indoor gym area) and from which children may take field trips to other settings such as museums, zoos, community facilities such as firehouses or police stations, or farms. Family child-care includes not only a house (and all its internal settings) but the yard and all the different settings that make up the neighborhood in which the home-based program is located. It is these settings, both inside and outside the home-based facility that offer numerous opportunities for teaching and learning. It is within these settings that a variety of routines and natural activities occur.

A first step in optimizing children's opportunities to learn within routines and natural activities is to understand the individual differences among children. Children are likely to have different interests and learning needs due to their different chronological ages. What may be of interest to a two year old is unlikely to be of interest in the same way to a four year old. Children also have different interests for reasons other than

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their ages. These differences may be based on experiences, talents, preferences, or inclinations. Some children lean toward interests in creative expression, for example, while others may be more interested in sports and physical activity. Children may have different learning needs, also, not just based on chronological age but on their abilities. While children of different ages have different abilities, children develop at different rates in different developmental areas and may need particular experiences to help them develop maximally. Some children may be very able to sit and listen to a story while others, of the same age, may have difficulty remaining in one place or may listen for shorter periods of time than other children of the same age. Children with delays in development or with particular types of disabilities may need more opportunities to develop abilities in particular areas. A child with a physical disability, for example, may need more practice at learning to hold a crayon and drawing or writing than may other children of the same age.

Once a child care provider understands the differences among children in terms of their interests, likes, abilities, needs, dislikes, gifts and talents, etc., each child's strengths and interests can become the basis on which learning opportunities are built. The many settings in which children in family care participate and the routines and natural activities that occur in those settings become the context into which specific learning opportunities are embedded.

Mattie used her neighborhood and a typical routine of walking children to the local elementary school to provide opportunities for children to learn about their environment and about science. She integrated the experiences that the children had

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on their walk with structured activities during her morning activities when everyone got back home again. In this way, she capitalized on the interests of the children while offering opportunities for the children to practice individual abilities such as expressing themselves, using creative expression, and listening.

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SESSION OUTLINE

- I** Welcome

- II** Settings & Environments
 - Activity 1: Settings**

- III** Scheduling
 - Activity 2: Schedules**

- IV** Identifying Children's Learning Needs
 - Activity 3: Children's Learning Needs**

- V** Multipurpose Activities
 - Activity 4: Multipurpose Routines & Activities: Opportunities for Teaching & Learning**

- VI** Summing Up: How to Make Routines Go Well

Settings

Routines and Activities Plan

	Morning	Late Morning/Lunch	Early Afternoon	Late Afternoon
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

Learning Styles & Needs

Child's Name: _____ Date: _____

Likes	Special Interests
Abilities	Need to Practice
Need to Learn	Special Gifts & Talents
Friends at Childcare	Dislikes?

Facilitating Children's Participation

Improve Routine
or Activity



Promote
Participation
in Activity or
Routine



Environmental Accommodations

- Adapt Room Set-up
- Adapt/Select Equipment
- Equipment/Adaptations for Positioning

Select or Adapt Activity

Adapt Materials

Adapt Requirements or Instructions

Have Another Child Help-

- Peer Assistance/Tutoring
- Cooperative Learning

Have an Individual Child do Something Different

Have an Adult Help a Child Do the Activity

Have an Individual Child Do Something Outside of the Room (with an Adult)

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

Dodge, D. T. & Colker, L. J. (1991). The creative curriculum for family child care. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies.

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Dodge, D. T., Koralek, D. G., & Foulks, D. D. (1994). Caring for children in family child care: A trainer's guide. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies.

Kontos, S. (1992). Family day care: Out of the shadows and into the limelight. Washington, DC, NAEYC.

Kontos, S., Howes, C., & Galinsky, E. (1996). Does training make a difference to quality in family child care? Early childhood research quarterly, 11, 427-445.

Kontos, S., Howes, C., Shinn, M., & Galinsky (1994). Quality in family child care and relative care. NY: Teachers College Press.

What Did You Learn Today?

1. Did you make any changes in your care space since the last session? Explain
2. List 2- 3 main points you learned from this session.
3. I am leaving this session with a better idea about how to:
4. What is one thing you plan to do differently in your care space before the next session?