



Primary Caregiving Participant Worksheet

Directions: Use this worksheet to take notes about how this information relates to your work with infants, toddlers, and their families and engage in the activities during this session. For additional space to take notes, use the back of this page.

Training Notes



Primary Caregiving: Training Activities

Slide 5. Reflect on Primary Caregiving

- ◆ What comes to mind when you think about primary caregiving?

Slide 7. Getting to Know You

- ◆ What do you really like to do?

- ◆ What is your favorite food?

- ◆ What would you like to learn about?

- ◆ What do you not like to do?



Slide 8. Primary Caregiving Rationale

- ◆ Why is primary caregiving important for infant and toddler care?

- ◆ How does primary caregiving promote positive child outcomes?

Slide 10. Video Example of Primary Caregiving

- ◆ How does primary caregiving support this infant and her family?

Slide 13. What Are Some Characteristics of Positive Caregiver-Child Interactions?

Provide examples of caregiver-child interactions.

- ◆ **Responsive** interactions:

- ◆ **Prompt** interactions:



◆ **Consistent** interactions:

◆ **Meaningful** interactions:

◆ **Respectful** interactions:

◆ Describe additional characteristics and definitions for positive caregiver-child interactions:

Slide 14. Positive Caregiver-Child Interactions

◆ Record your thoughts after the guided reflection.



Primary Caregiving

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

Rationale

High-quality relationship-based care is central to children's early brain development, emotional regulation, and learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2012). The Program for Infant/Toddler Care recommends six essential program practices as a framework for relationship-based care. One of these practices is **primary caregiving**—the practice in which the care of each infant or toddler is assigned to one specific caregiver who is principally responsible for caring for that child in the care setting and communicating with the child's family (Lally & Mangione, n.d.). Consistent, responsive, and meaningful interactions with a primary caregiver build a child's attachment with a familiar adult (Raikes & Edwards, 2009). Primary caregiving also strengthens relationships with families, which, in turn, supports the development of trust and security between the infant or toddler and the primary caregiver (Lally et al., 2010).

The primary caregiver's responsibilities include

- ◆ fostering a relationship with the child and his or her family;
- ◆ observing, documenting, and anticipating and planning for each child's development process and learning;
- ◆ supporting the child through transitions;
- ◆ carrying out the majority of the child's personal care routines; and
- ◆ providing emotional support.

Primary caregiving does not mean exclusive care. It means, however, that program leaders, caregivers, and families know who has primary responsibility for each child. Primary caregiving often happens naturally in family child care homes (Lally & Mangione, n.d.).

Why Is Primary Caregiving Important for Infants and Toddlers?

- ◆ Primary caregiving relationships provide a strong foundation for responsive interactions and communication between an infant or toddler and his or her caregiver (Ruprecht et al., 2016).
- ◆ Primary caregiving provides opportunities for caregivers to deepen their knowledge of a child's development, abilities, and interests, which allows for more accurate developmental assessments and individualized curriculum implementation (Theilheimer, 2006).



- ◆ Primary caregiving provides an opportunity for partnerships between families, primary caregivers, and specialists (for example, mental health, medical, occupational therapists) that support individualized care for infants and toddlers (McMullen et al., 2016).

How Does Primary Caregiving Promote Positive Child Outcomes?

- ◆ Infants and toddlers develop trust when primary caregivers respond to their unique temperament, needs, and interests (Cople & Bredekamp, 2009).
- ◆ Primary caregiving supports infants' and toddlers' identity and cultural connection to their families (Lally, 1995; Virmani & Mangione, 2013).
- ◆ Responsive primary caregivers buffer stress and help the infant or toddler regulate (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).
- ◆ Young children who do not have a primary caregiver and instead experience multiple caregivers (or multiple childcare settings in a day) are more likely to engage in challenging behavior (Clasien de Schipper et al., 2004; Morrissey, 2009).

Planning to Implement Primary Caregiving in Diverse Child Care Settings

Goal: High-quality infant and toddler programs implement primary caregiving for each infant and toddler.

- ◆ Implement written guidance to support primary caregiving throughout the program. This includes creating staff and family handbooks that share the importance of, as well as practices for, supporting primary caregiving strategies for infants and toddlers and their families.
- ◆ Create job descriptions for infant and toddler caregivers that include expectations for primary caregiving practices. This includes forming relationships with families, learning about families' home cultures and caregiving routines, and weaving the home care experiences into daily practice.
- ◆ Attend, create, or advocate for professional development that promotes primary caregiving.
 - Strengthen professional development of caregivers and administrators on the concepts and implementation of primary caregiving. This should start at orientation when hiring new staff and then continue throughout the years of employment.
- ◆ Use an intentional review process to continually strengthen primary caregiving across the center or family child care program.



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Reflective Exercise: Engaging in Respectful and Responsive Relationships

Think about one child that you cared for today and the interactions you had with her or him. How did you show respect for her or him? In what ways were you responsive?

Describe how you were:

- ◆ warm and caring;
- ◆ sensitive to the needs of the child as an individual;
- ◆ available when the child needed you;
- ◆ supportive and encouraging; and
- ◆ responsive to the child's efforts to communicate with you.

While caring for a group of children, there may be moments when you are not as responsive as you would like to be toward an individual child. Taking time to think about and recognize these missed opportunities can lead to deeper reflection. As you think about the same child, ask yourself the following:

- ◆ Were there missed opportunities to be responsive? How did you know? What got in the way?
- ◆ What would you do differently next time?
- ◆ Is there any support you need from your colleagues or program?

Think about the last time you interacted with a family member of that child. How did you show respect for her or him? In what ways were you responsive?

While interacting with a group of children, their family members, and your colleagues, there may also be moments when you were not as responsive or respectful with family members as you would like to be. Again, recognize these missed opportunities can help you reflect and consider if there are changes you would like to make in your approach with family members. As you think about the same family member(s), ask yourself the following:

- ◆ Were there missed opportunities to have respectful and responsive interactions? How did you know? What got in the way?
- ◆ What would you do differently next time?
- ◆ Is there any support you need from your colleagues or program?



Set two goals for yourself to have responsive relationships with this child and his or her family members:

1.

2.

In the next couple of weeks, take time to think about your progress toward these goals.

- ◆ Were there times when you had more responsive interactions with the child or family member?
- ◆ Have you noticed changes in the child's or family members' behavior when you have been more responsive?
- ◆ In what areas do you need more support? Who or what can provide that support?

If possible, do this with a partner and discuss your goals and progress with each other.

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Assigning Primary Care Teachers

A variety of factors must be taken into consideration when assigning primary infant care teachers to children, including family eligibility; enrollment priorities; regulations and licensing requirements for age grouping, ratios, and group size; and vacant slots. However, decisions about primary care assignments should be made, to the greatest degree possible, in accordance with each child's unique needs and abilities as well as the needs of the groups. These priorities include

- matching of staff and child schedules;
- maintaining low ratios and group size;
- supporting goodness of temperament fit between child and infant care teacher;
- creating a comfortable balance of temperament types in a group;
- matching home language and culture of the child;
- responding to family preferences;
- supporting continuity with a family when the infant care teacher has cared for a sibling;
- providing a comfortable range of ages within the group;
- providing peer companionship for children of different ages;
- child's preferences of infant care teacher;
- infant care teacher's preferences;
- infant care teacher's ability to meet the needs of a child with a disability or other special needs; and
- appropriate placement with respect to age and stage of the child.

1. When the primary infant care teacher is absent or leaves the program:

- Reassign the children to a secondary infant care teacher in the same room, if possible.
- Employ a regular "resource teacher" or extra staff person to substitute for primary infant care teachers.
- Provide substitutes from outside the program who have prior experience in the room and are familiar with the children.
- Use familiar substitutes, if necessary, with older children and in support roles to the familiar infant care teacher(s).

- Have the new primary infant care teacher begin work before the existing primary infant care teacher leaves to ease the transition.
- Have the secondary infant care teacher(s) in the room provide a bridge to the relationship with the new infant care teacher.

2. For programs with observers, interns, student workers, and volunteers:

- Hire regular staff members so that children can be assigned to primary infant care teachers who are consistently available.
- Provide visitors and students with opportunities for unobtrusive observation, if possible.
- Limit the number of adults (other than family members) in the room at any one time.
- Establish policies that provide the greatest continuity of care possible for the youngest children.

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