

Plan Developmentally Appropriate Activities

YOUNG CHILDREN develop at different rates, and older adults may have different developmental levels due to mental or physical impairments. When caregivers plan activities for these groups, they must consider the developmental level of the individuals to find activities that are appropriate. Good activities are easily adaptable to suit a range of developmental levels, and they support further development through play. In this unit, you will learn how to identify and plan developmentally appropriate activities for young children or older adults.



Objectives:



1. Identify developmentally appropriate activities for young children and older adults.
2. Explain how to plan developmentally appropriate activities.

Key Terms:



attention span
implementation
interest approach
objectives
transitions

Identifying Appropriate Activities

There are many factors teachers or caregivers should consider when determining what activities are developmentally appropriate for program participants. Caregivers should first consider the developmental level of the participants. Even within the same age group, developmental levels may vary, so caregivers should look for appropriate activities for the whole group whenever possible.

ATTENTION SPAN

The **attention span** is the amount of time an individual is able to spend focusing on any one activity. Infants and toddlers change activities frequently. Their attention spans may only be a few minutes long. In contrast, preschoolers can focus on a single activity for a longer time (e.g., 10 to 20 minutes). Older adults' attention spans may vary based on their health and cognitive levels.

Caregivers should plan activities that can be completed by participants who usually display the shortest attention spans in the group. Individuals with longer attention spans may choose to spend longer on an activity. For example, a simple art project may hold some children's attention for only a few minutes, while others may spend a longer time adding details to their projects. Likewise, small groups of participants may repeat an activity or game if they remain interested, while other individuals may move on to a new activity.

ACTIVITY LEVEL

Caregivers must consider the activity level of the participants. Caregivers should provide a mix of active or noisy activities and sedentary or quiet activities. This provides a balance throughout the day. Children may be able to sit still and focus on story time better after expending energy by playing outside. Likewise, older adults may remain more alert for quiet activities if they are encouraged to participate in physical activity at times.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Importance of Developmentally Appropriate Activities

Young children do not learn by sitting at a desk, listening to a teacher list facts, or reading from a textbook. Children learn by playing, interacting with their peers, and participating in developmentally appropriate activities.

Visit the following Web site to watch a short video explaining the importance of developmentally appropriate activities and how they can affect a child's performance and attitude toward school later in life.

<http://ctefile.ed.uiuc.edu/mahara/view/view.php?id=227>

ABILITIES

Caregivers should take into account the abilities of participants when planning activities. Children typically develop at different speeds, although they generally master skills in the same sequence. They build upon their existing skills: from simple to complex, from general to specific, and from concrete to abstract. For instance, toddlers learn the simple skill of walking before they master the complex skill of jumping. Infants learn the general arm movement of waving before they learn the specific movement of holding a pencil. Children are able to identify concrete objects (e.g., a book or cat) before they can express abstract feelings with words. Older adults may lose complex or specific abilities but retain simple or general skills.

ADAPTABILITY

Activities should be adaptable to serve the various developmental levels of the participants. If activities are too easy, children do not learn, and older adults may become bored. If activities are too difficult, participants may become frustrated, and the individual's self-esteem may suffer.

Inappropriate activities could cause injury. For example, children under the age of three should not play games with small pieces, which could pose a choking hazard. Likewise, older adults with mobility problems should not be led through rocky, uneven ground on a nature walk.



FIGURE 1. A nature trail that has any kind of uneven ground would not be appropriate for older adults with mobility problems.

Planning Appropriate Activities

Once caregivers have considered the developmental levels of the participants, they can begin to plan appropriate activities. The first step is to identify the **objectives** (specific goals of the activities), which may include themes and lessons as well as the developmental goals. So caregivers should think about what they expect participants to learn from the activity.

MATERIALS

Activity planners should identify and gather materials and supplies for the activity. Equipment and materials may already be available in the classroom. If not, new materials may be

purchased, donated, or borrowed (depending on the budget). In many cases, teachers create materials by building equipment or repurposing existing items. They could make props (e.g., puppets, flannel boards, dress-up clothing, games, or flash cards) using supplies that are available in the facility or online.

INTEREST APPROACH

The planner should create an **interest approach**, which is an introduction to the lesson or theme designed to capture the participants' attention. This may include a brief description of what the activity will include. In some cases, the teacher may present interesting items to the students or ask questions before beginning.



FIGURE 2. When considering how long a painting activity will take, the teacher should include time for set up, any necessary transitions, and clean up.

IMPLEMENTATION

The activity leader should plan the **implementation** (the procedure or method of carrying out the activity). The planner must consider how long the activity will take, including set up, clean up, and **transitions**—the time between the end of one activity and the start of the next one. The activity should fit within the normal daily routine. For example, music time may last for 10 minutes each day immediately following story time, but the music activity may change. One day students may listen to a CD, and the next day they may play instruments or perform finger plays or songs. Major changes to the routine (e.g., a field trip) should be infrequent.

Number of Participants

The planner should consider how many people should participate in the activity at one time. Some activities are suited for the entire group, while others work better with small groups or with individual participants.

Summarize and Follow Up

After the activity, the leader should summarize and follow up on what was learned. During this time, the activity leader should answer participants' questions about the activity, provide additional information, or present other activities that support the lesson.

Summary:



When planning activities for young children or older adults, caregivers should consider the participants' developmental level, including their attention spans, activity levels, and abilities. Young children learn best through hands-on activities that are not too easy or too difficult.

When planning activities, caregivers should identify the objectives, gather materials, and create an interest approach. The next step is to plan the activity implementation after considering the length of time and the number of individuals who can participate concurrently. Finally, the planner should allow time to summarize the activity and to follow up with more information or activities to support the same lesson.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What three factors should be considered when determining if an activity is developmentally appropriate?
2. How might participants' attention spans differ among different age groups?
3. What is the main sequence of acquiring developmental skills?
4. What are the five steps for planning a developmentally appropriate activity?
5. What factors should be considered when planning the implementation of an activity?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Observe a child care or preschool classroom. Take note of the developmentally appropriate activities you see. Later, invite the teacher to visit your class. Be prepared to ask questions about the objectives and implementation of specific activities you observed. Ask how the activity could be altered to remain appropriate for an individual with delayed or advanced developmental levels. If the teacher cannot visit your classroom, ask if you can interview him or her in person, on the phone, or via email.

Web Links:



Ideas for Fun Activities for the Elderly

http://seniors.lovetoknow.com/Ideas_for_Fun_Activities_for_the_Elderly

Physical Activities for Toddlers

<http://babyparenting.about.com/od/activitiesandplay/qt/planning-physical-activities.htm>

Themes and Activities

<http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/Themes/>