

THE HIGHSCOPE INFANT-TODDLER CURRICULUM

What, How, and Why



WE ENGAGE. WE PLAY. WE ENCOURAGE.

Our research-based, active learning curriculum has been carefully designed to promote independent, creative thinking; decision making; and problem solving in children from birth through kindergarten. The HighScope Infant-Toddler Curriculum focuses on providing engaging classrooms and routines that support children's play with a variety of learning opportunities, as well as encouraging adult-child interactions.

By applying intentional teaching methods that engage young children based on their level of interest and development, HighScope takes the learning process beyond traditional academic subjects while preparing them for later schooling and future success in life. This child-focused approach to early education achieves powerful, positive results.

WHAT WE TEACH

How do you provide care for your youngest while nurturing their growth and development? The answer is often found in the curriculum. The curriculum you choose, and the quality of how you implement that curriculum, affects the quality of care for those infants and toddlers. Choosing a curriculum that fits the needs of your infants and toddlers, their families, and, of course, you, is an important decision that requires careful consideration.

Research based and child focused, the HighScope Infant-Toddler Curriculum uses a carefully designed process of learning through discovery, called active participatory learning. During active learning, caregivers encourage infants and toddlers to discover the world around them by exploring and playing. Learning and development are anchored by long-term, trusting relationships with caregivers, who are close at hand to support children as they play. In the HighScope I-T Curriculum, learning is focused on the following six content areas that correspond to state and national standards

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development and Health
- Communication, Language, and Literacy
- Cognitive Development
- Creative Arts

HOW WE TEACH

Taking care of very young children involves more than just meeting their physical needs. Today, caregivers see themselves as responsive professionals concerned about all aspects of children's development. By using the clearly defined practices of the HighScope Infant-Toddler Curriculum, caregivers develop close, supportive relationships with the children in their care.

In a HighScope program, caregivers support children's natural desire to be active learners. Creating an active learning environment for infants and toddlers means consciously considering all their needs — their social and emotional, physical, cognitive, and sociolinguistic needs.

PRINCIPLES OF ACTIVE LEARNING

- Infants and toddlers learn with their whole body and with all their senses.
- Infants and toddlers learn because they want to.
- Infants and toddlers communicate what they know.
- Infants and toddlers learn within the context of trusting relationships.

The principles of active learning guide the decisions caregivers make about:

- Adult-child interaction
- Arrangement of the room and physical environment
- Daily schedules and routines
- Observations and planning for children (how to evaluate what children are learning and plan from there)

ADULT-CHILD INTERACTION

Infants and toddlers are explorers — Their interactions with trusted adults provide the emotional fuel these very young children need to puzzle out the mysteries of the social and physical world. HighScope provides a range of strategies caregivers can use to create supportive interactions with infants and toddlers.

Because trusting relationships are so important, caregivers strive to ensure that each infant or toddler in a child care center or home has the same primary caregiver throughout enrollment, whether that be for six months or three years. In settings with multiple caregivers, each caregiver is the “primary” for only a small group of children, and the caregivers form a stable team that provides long-term continuity of care for children and families.



Guided by practical theories of child development, caregivers attempt to see things from the child’s point of view, encourage rather than thwart children’s efforts and communications, take cues from children rather than impose their own ideas, and assume a problem-solving approach to children’s interpersonal conflicts rather than punish children or solve their problems for them. Caregivers strive to form positive, reciprocal relationships with children by establishing a psychologically safe environment, where children’s initiatives are regarded as purposeful rather than naughty or bothersome for adults.

Very young children are just formulating a sense of themselves and an understanding of what the rest of the world is all about. Children’s interactions with parents and caregivers significantly influence the life-long conclusions they draw from their experiences. Parents’ and caregivers’ supportive interactions help shape children’s perceptions of themselves as capable, trusted, and trustworthy human beings.

THE ROOM

In a HighScope infant-toddler program, the physical space is safe, flexible, and child oriented to provide comfort and to accommodate children's changing developmental needs and interests. Providing an active learning environment means considering infants' and toddlers' needs to look, listen, wiggle, roll, crawl, climb, rock, bounce, rest, eat, make noise, grasp or mouth or drop things, and be messy from time to time.

HighScope caregivers are trained to stock the setting with a wide variety of materials that infants and toddlers can reach, explore, and play with in their own way at their own pace. Materials appeal to children's senses and have varied properties (including wood, metal, and textured materials; found materials; and natural materials). The storage of materials is consistent, personalized, and accessible so that infants and toddlers can reach or get to the materials they see and want to explore.

The space and materials are organized into play and care areas that serve the needs of infants and toddlers. For example, the toddler block area includes a good supply of small and large blocks for satisfying stacking and balancing experiences.

PLAY AND CARE AREAS

The care and play areas are distinct and organized with children's activities in mind and often include the following areas:

- Eating and food preparation
- Sleeping and napping
- Bodily care
- Infant indoor play
- Toddler movement
- Toddler sand and water
- Toddler book
- Toddler art
- Toddler block
- Toddler house
- Outdoor play

It is recommended that specialized areas with fixed purposes, such as the diapering, block, eating, and napping areas, are organized around the perimeter of the room with the middle space left open for active play. Movable furnishings, equipment, and storage containers are recommended to accommodate multiple uses. There should be easy access to an outdoor play yard.

The physical environment, in short, is secure and inviting. Within its boundaries, infants and toddlers are free to move about, explore materials, exercise creativity, and solve problems.

DAILY SCHEDULES

In HighScope settings, caregivers maintain the overall routine as consistently as possible, while flexing it to accommodate individual children's natural rhythms and temperaments. Each child's individual schedule is anchored around a primary caregiver who strives to understand the child's individual temperament and assists with smooth transitions between segments. Having this caregiver as a "home base" provides the very young child with a sense of security while away from home.

Although each HighScope program decides on the routine that works best for its setting, schedule, and children, the segments described below are always included during the day. It is up to the program to decide the length and order of the segments, whether particular segments will be repeated, and the content of the experiences in each segment.

PARTS OF THE DAILY SCHEDULE

- Arrivals and departures
- Choice times
- Group times
- Outside time
- Caregiving routines
- Transition times
- Team planning time

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Caregivers work with parents to ensure that arrivals and departures are pleasant and reassuring for children. These times allow children to extend the bonds of trust they have with their parents to the caregivers in the program. The physical locations where arrivals and departures take place depend on the needs of children and their parents.

CHOICE TIMES

During this part of the daily routine, caregivers are attentive and offer emotional and physical support to children as the children play and explore their environment at their own pace. Caregivers tailor their responses to children's ideas, engage in give-and-take communication with the children, imitate children's actions, support children's play with other children, and assist children in problem solving. They also support older toddlers in planning and recalling their choice-time activities.

GROUP TIMES

In small groups of older infants and toddlers, caregivers provide a particular set of materials for children to explore in a common activity. In these group times, children remain in close contact with the caregiver while having a shared experience with other children. Although the adults introduce the activities, children remain free to make choices about materials and how to use them. Adults follow the children's cues (e.g., deciding how long the activity lasts, based on children's interest levels).

OUTSIDE TIME

This segment of the day allows infants and toddlers to explore the outdoor world. Using strategies similar to those used at choice time, adults support children's exploration and interests, providing open-ended materials and a variety of experiences. Young infants who are not yet crawling may spend time on a blanket lying on their backs and looking around, reaching for objects, and feeling the sun and air. Older infants sit and explore toys and natural objects, crawl, and pull themselves up to a stand. With assistance, they may swing or go for a wagon ride. Toddlers will use the open area of the play space for a wide range of physical movements, simple games, and problem solving as they pursue their interests.

CAREGIVING ROUTINES

In addition to strengthening bonds with children during meals, rest, and bodily care routines, caregivers also use these care giving routines as opportunities to share control by finding ways for the children to play an active role. Caregivers fit these times around children's exploration and play. Frequency of naps is based around each child's individual needs, with quiet alternatives provided for non-nappers. Adults also accommodate children's individual styles of waking up. Similarly, adults take cues from children about feedings and diaper changes rather than asserting control to make the schedule more convenient for themselves.

TRANSITION TIMES

The timing of transitions is flexible, based on children's needs and engagement in their play, and the shift in events or activities should be kept low-key and comfortable. Caregivers organize the parts of the day in a logical fashion, just as one would do in one's personal routine. They strive to avoid unnecessary transitions, such as having children remove all their outdoor wear after playing outside and then putting it back on again to go home after a brief indoor group time. Instead, caregivers might schedule their daily routine so outside time occurs prior to departure time.

HOW WE EVALUATE

Research tells us that the best programs consistently measure how well caregivers do their jobs and whether children are developing as they should be. They use the results to continue what is working and improve what is not; for example, to decide whether to provide more training to caregivers or to redesign infants' and toddlers' play areas.

HighScope has developed two infant-toddler assessment tools to carry out this process of assessing children's development and reviewing and strengthening programs.

TEAM PLANNING TIME

Teachers observe and collect anecdotes for the COR to use with daily team planning time. This happens every day in a HighScope program. It can occur during children's naptime, before children arrive, or after they leave. The teaching team meets to discuss their observations of children's developing abilities and interests, focusing on these observations as

COR ADVANTAGE

COR Advantage is HighScope's birth-to-kindergarten child assessment, which evaluates children's learning in nine content areas. Each day, teachers and caregivers document brief written descriptions, or anecdotes, that objectively describe these very young children's behaviors. They use these notes to evaluate children's development and then plan activities to help infants and toddlers and the program as a whole progress.

PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT

The Infant-Toddler Program Quality Assessment (PQA) evaluates whether teachers and agencies are using the most effective classroom and program management practices. Each area of classroom teaching and program operations is rated to identify strengths and areas for improvement. (Also available are versions of the PQA for evaluating preschool or family child care programs.)

WHY HIGHSCOPE

The HighScope Curriculum was designed in result of extensive research that supports our belief that children learn best when they actively participate in the learning process through direct experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas as they discover the world around them.

More than 50 years of research has proven that the HighScope Curriculum advances the development of children and helps them to build lifelong skills that positively impacts their future success. National research conducted with children from different backgrounds has shown that those who attend HighScope programs score higher on measures of development than similar children enrolled in other preschool and child care programs.

HighScope has a long history studying Infant-Toddler development including The Ypsilanti-Carnegie Infant Education project, Parent-to-Parent Home Visit project, and the Case-study follow-up of the Parent-to-Parent Dissemination Project. HighScope is perhaps best known for the HighScope Perry Preschool Study that established the lasting human and financial value of early childhood education by comparing children who attended our program with those who did not. As adults, preschool participants had greater high school graduation rates, higher monthly earnings, less use of welfare, and fewer arrests than those not enrolled in the program.

Not only did the study prove the benefit of early education on the individual who attended preschool, the results show that preschool education also benefits the community. Preschool education leads to savings for taxpayers: for every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood education, society saves \$13 in the cost of special education, public assistance, unemployment benefits, and crime.

The HighScope approach is consistent with the best practices recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start Program Performance Standards, and other guidelines for developmentally based programs. The HighScope Infant-Toddler Curriculum meets all state standards that have been published. You can view the map on our website for more information.