



## New Year's Resolutions for Infant/Toddler Teachers

**Every year at this time**, many of us think about making New Year's resolutions, providing a focus for personal changes. This year, you may want to think about making some professional New Year's resolutions too, focusing on your work as a teacher of infants and toddlers. Here are some suggestions:

**1. Reflect.** Think about the partnerships you have with the families of the children in your care. Consider ways you can strengthen those relationships. **Asking questions** and **listening** to parents' responses is one of the best ways to build a relationship. Try to stop yourself from giving advice and just listen; practice showing empathy and understanding. Make mental notes about the concerns expressed so you can follow up with parents, checking on their well-being. Update or make family books or picture boards with new photographs of and information about the families and other important people in each child's life. Include your own family book, with pictures of yourself and the important people in your life.

**2. Watch.** Children from birth to three change rapidly. Jeree Pawl says, "Don't just do something; stand there and pay attention!" (Pawl & St. John 1998, 7). Babies need people who watch them closely, **noticing** and **responding** to their newly developing skills. Be sure to respond to their successes. When a young child completes a task such as putting a square block into a square hole, she looks up to see if you noticed. Your smile, clapping, and expressions of joy in the child's accomplishment help her build positive self-esteem while encouraging her to continue trying new tasks.

When sitting with an infant or toddler, try to **follow his lead** by repeating the child's actions, words, and sounds. If he makes a gesture, make the same one, repeating gestures as the child continues. Once the child connects to your play, you can make a slight change in the gesture. Watch to see if the child repeats what you have done. For example, if a baby bangs a block on the floor, you can take a block and bang it on the floor in the same way. After continuing play back and forth a few times, alter the block banging in some way. Watch to see if the baby tries to copy your change to the play. Watching, responding, and sharing power with children during play promotes their feelings of control, allowing them to direct the play while giving you an opportunity to watch and join in as they share their interests and skills.

**3. Change.** As you **watch** and **evaluate** each child's developing skills, think about changes you may need to make in the physical environment. Is the space adequate for the rapid development that occurs during this period of birth to 3? You might need to rearrange furniture so new crawlers and beginning walkers have safe places to move about, practice pulling up, and cruise.

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Illustration by Melanie Hope Greenberg.

Step back and look at the overall room. Lie on your back or get on your knees to see the space from a baby's point of view. How busy are the walls? What and how much décor is hanging from the ceiling? Is the environment overstimulating for very young children who are not yet able to regulate their senses? Are there private places where one or two children can play without being disturbed? Remember to introduce changes slowly and with the toddlers' help—they too have ownership in the room.

**4. Add toys and materials.** Is there enough **variety** to meet children's developing skills? As you watch the children use their skills, think about the materials and toys you can add to provide opportunities for practice. For example, toddlers 18 to 24 months often practice their small motor skills by opening and closing objects. Collect clean, empty plastic jars and lids from face creams, eye creams, and body creams of different sizes, then place them in a basket on a shelf for exploration. Babies learn through their senses and love to feel different textures and materials. Toys and objects of polished wood, metal, cork, sandpaper, felt, velvet, and suede provide wonderful sensory exploration opportunities.

Arrange like toys together and label shelves with both pictures and words to help the infants and toddlers put things back in their places and begin building literacy skills. Remove toys and other materials that no longer challenge or interest the children. **Include duplicates** of all toys and materials, when possible, to reduce conflict and offer opportunities for parallel play. Review and update your curriculum plan, replacing learning experiences and activities or adapting them to meet the changing skills of the infants and toddlers in your care.

**5. Challenge yourself.** Increase your knowledge about infants, toddlers, and their families by regularly reading one new book or article about an area of infant and toddler care or development—physical, socioemotional, or cognitive development; brain development research; the importance of relationships in the lives of infants and toddlers (see the recommended resource list on the next page). Consider becoming a member of a local, regional, or national professional organization. Such organizations offer unlimited opportunities to access the growing information about infants, toddlers, and their families and the best practices for providing group care for babies and toddlers.

### THINK ABOUT IT

Take time to reflect on the way you like to learn new information. Think about the resolutions suggested here or make some of your own. Check out the resource list, which includes Web resources, books, DVDs, and articles that can increase your knowledge of infant and toddler care.

### TRY IT

Once you have decided on one or two resolutions, share them online with others. Go to the NAEYC interest community on infants and toddlers (Infant/Toddler Professionals Interest Forum) at [www.naeyc.org/members](http://www.naeyc.org/members), if you are a member of this interest community, and post your resolution in the infant/toddler online community's discussion forum. If you are not a member, then think about joining (see "Joining an NAEYC Online Community"). That could be New Year's Resolution #1.

### Reference

Pawl, J., & M. St. John. 1998. *How you are is as important as what you do . . . in making a positive difference for infants, toddlers, and their families*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE Press.

## Joining an **naeyc**<sup>®</sup> Online Community

If you are not yet a member of NAEYC's Infant/Toddler Professionals Interest Forum—or any other NAEYC online community—here's how to join.

1. Go to [www.naeyc.org/members](http://www.naeyc.org/members) and log in.
2. Under **Members Only**, click on the bulleted item **Go to NAEYC's Online Communities** to find the online communities homepage.
3. In the **Getting Started in NAEYC Communities** dialog box, click on **How to Use NAEYC Communities**.
4. Scroll down to item 2.3—**How to Join New Communities** for full instructions on joining the Infant/Toddler Professionals Interest Forum. See, it's easy!

You also may want to click on **Overview of Interest Forums**, in the **Getting Started in NAEYC Communities** dialog box, to find other learning communities that address your interests.

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## Recommended Resources

### Articles

- Dichtelmiller, M.L., & L. Ensler. 2004. New insights in infant/toddler assessment: Experiences from the field. *Young Children* 59 (1): 30–33. [www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200401](http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200401)
- Dombro, A.L., & C. Lerner. 2006. Sharing the care of infants and toddlers. *Young Children* 61 (1): 29–33.
- Elliott, E. 2003. Challenging our assumptions: Helping a baby adjust to center care. *Young Children* 58 (4): 22–28. [www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200307/ChallengingOurAs.pdf](http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200307/ChallengingOurAs.pdf)
- Sawyers, J.K., & C.S. Rogers. 2003. Helping babies play. Beyond the Journal, *Young Children on the Web*, May 2003. [www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200305/HelpingBabies\\_Sawyers.pdf](http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200305/HelpingBabies_Sawyers.pdf)
- Soltero, M. 2004. Reflections on infant/toddler care. *Young Children* 59 (5): 30–31. [www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200409/soltero.pdf](http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200409/soltero.pdf)

### Books

- Baker, A.C., & L.A. Manfredi/Petitt. 2004. *Relationships, the heart of quality care: Creating community among adults in early care settings*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.
- Bardige, B., J. Lally, A. Griffin, E. Fenichel, M. Segal, E. Szanton, & B. Weissbourd. In press. *Caring for infants and toddlers in groups: Developmentally appropriate practice*. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.
- Gonzalez-Mena, J., & D. Eyer. 2004. *Infants, toddlers, and caregivers: A curriculum of respectful, responsive care and education*. 6th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Honig, A.S. 2001. *Secure relationships: Nurturing infant/toddler attachment in early care settings*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.
- Miller, K. 1999. *Simple steps: Developmental activities for infants, toddlers, and two-year-olds*. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House.
- Miller, K. 2000. *Things to do with toddlers and twos*. Rev. ed. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House.
- Miller, K. 2005. *Simple transitions for infants and toddlers*. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House. (Also *More things to do with toddlers and twos* [1984].)
- Parlakian, R., & N. Seibel. 2002. *Building strong foundations: Practical guidance for promoting the social-emotional development of infants and toddlers*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.
- Rice, K.F., & B.A. Groves. 2005. *Hope and healing: A caregiver's guide to helping young children affected by trauma*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE. Available through NAEYC.

### Videos and DVDs

- Acquiring self-regulation: Social and emotional development of infants and toddlers*. 2003. VHS, DVD. The Child Care Collection at Ball State University. 22 min. Available from NAEYC.
- Communication and learning*. 2003. VHS, DVD. The Child Care Collection at Ball State University. 20 min. Available from NAEYC.
- Cooing, crying, cuddling: Infant brain development*. 1998. VHS, DVD. The Child Care Collection at Ball State University. 28 min. Available from NAEYC.
- Laughing, learning, loving: Toddler brain development*. 1998. VHS, DVD. The Child Care Collection at Ball State University. 28 min. Available from NAEYC.

### Web sites, programs, and organizations

- Better Brains for Babies** is a collaboration of Georgia organizations dedicated to awareness and education about the importance of early brain development for infants and young children. [www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/bbb/index.php](http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/bbb/index.php)
- BrainWonders** provides information about early brain development and the relationships between babies and their parents and caregivers that support development. [www.zerotothree.org/brainwonders](http://www.zerotothree.org/brainwonders)
- Early Head Start National Resource Center** (EHS NRC) supports high-quality services to Early Head Start and Migrant Head Start expectant parents and families with infants and toddlers. [www.ehsnrc.org](http://www.ehsnrc.org)
- National Infant and Toddler Child Care Initiative** at ZERO TO THREE works with Child Care and Development Fund administrators and other partners to improve the quality and supply of infant and toddler child care. [www.nccic.org/ITCC](http://www.nccic.org/ITCC)
- Ohio's Infant/Toddler Guidelines** are the first step to ensuring that all Ohio children, birth to 3, have responsive, reciprocal, and respectful care. Others can use these guidelines as a model. [www.occrra.org/inf-todd/Files/InfantToddlerGuides.pdf](http://www.occrra.org/inf-todd/Files/InfantToddlerGuides.pdf)
- PITC, The Program for Infant/Toddler Care**, promotes responsive care for infants and toddlers. [www.pitc.org](http://www.pitc.org)
- Resources for Infant Educators** (RIE) has an approach based on respect that nurtures infants to become competent, confident, curious, attentive, exploring, and more. [www.rie.org](http://www.rie.org)
- WestEd** is a nonprofit research, development, and service agency that promotes learning for infants, toddlers, youth, and adults. [www.wested.org](http://www.wested.org)
- ZERO TO THREE** provides numerous resources that support the healthy development and well-being of infants, toddlers, and their families. [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)