



## Shifting to an Equity Lens: Strengthening and Supporting Infant and Toddler Teaching with Developmentally Appropriate Practice

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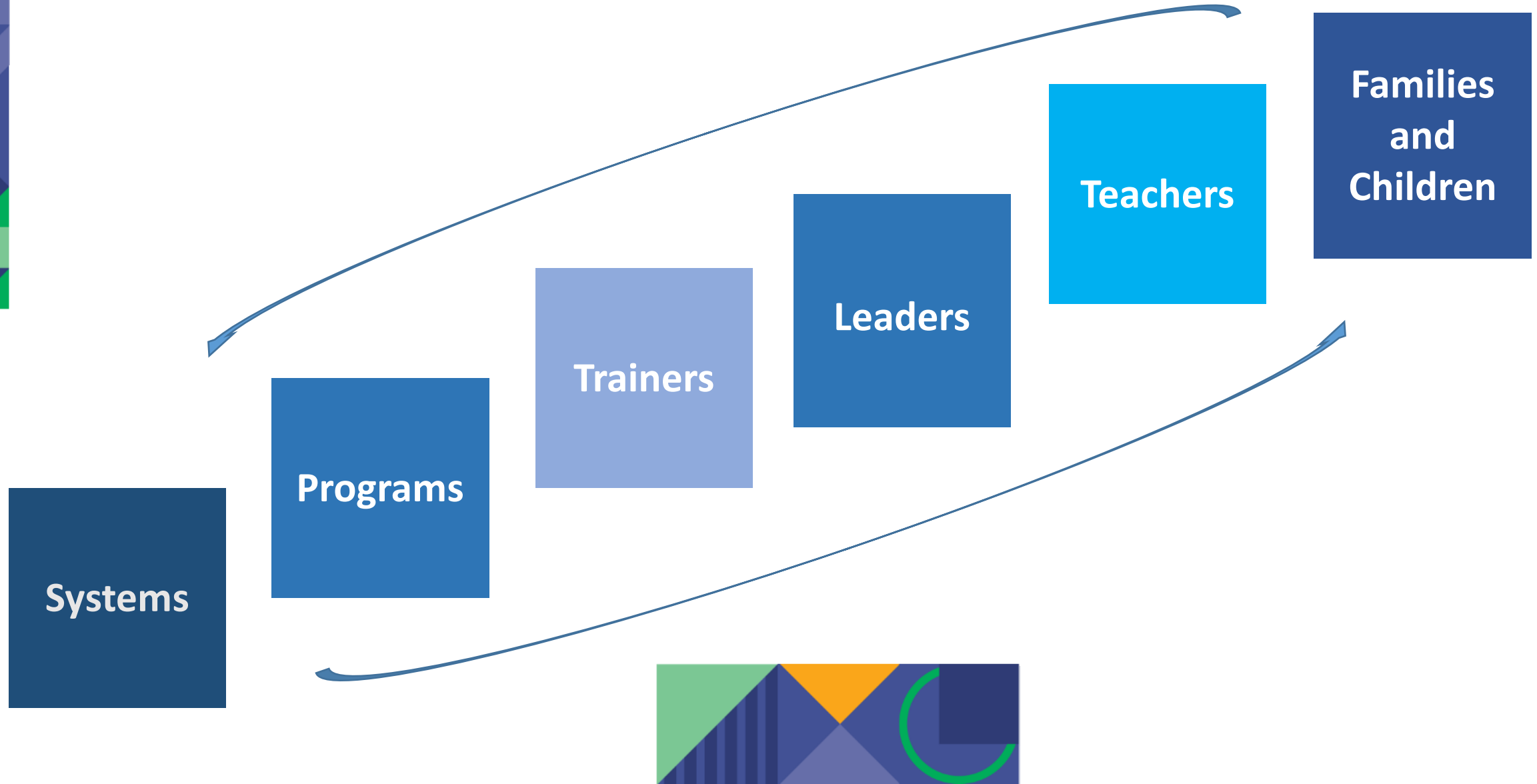
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Thanks for supporting infant and toddler teaching!





**Handouts for this Session:** [www.mariemasterson.com](http://www.mariemasterson.com)

Leading for  
Impact: High-  
Impact Levers

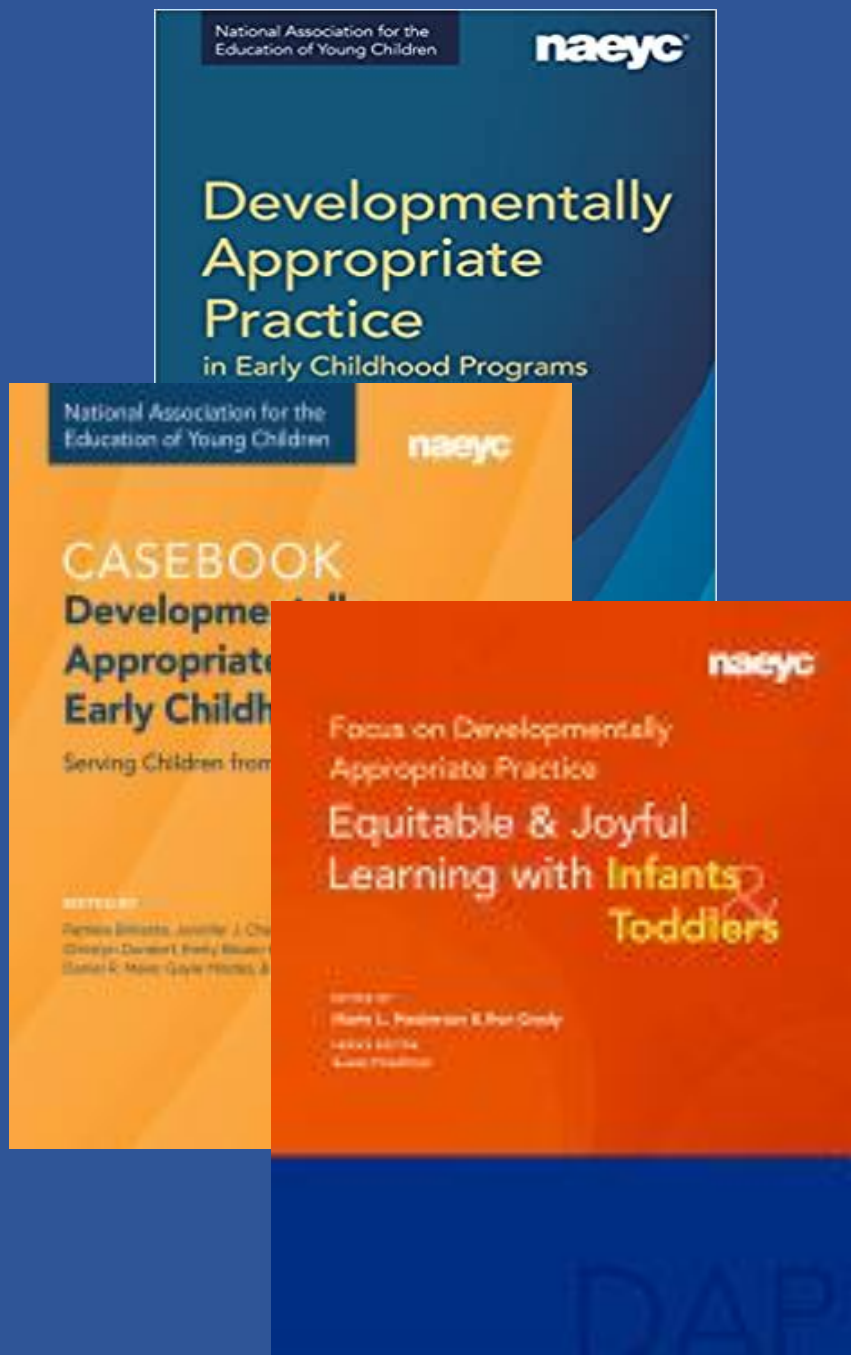
Behavior Guidance  
with Infants and  
Toddlers

High-Priority  
Teaching  
Strategies

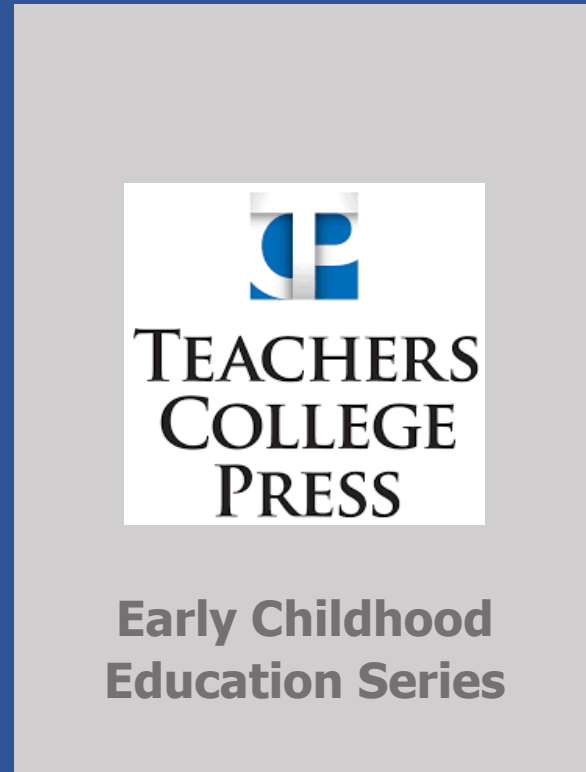
Strategy Toolbox  
for Teachers:  
Creating  
Moments of Joyful  
Learning

Family Survey:  
Culturally  
Responsive  
Communication

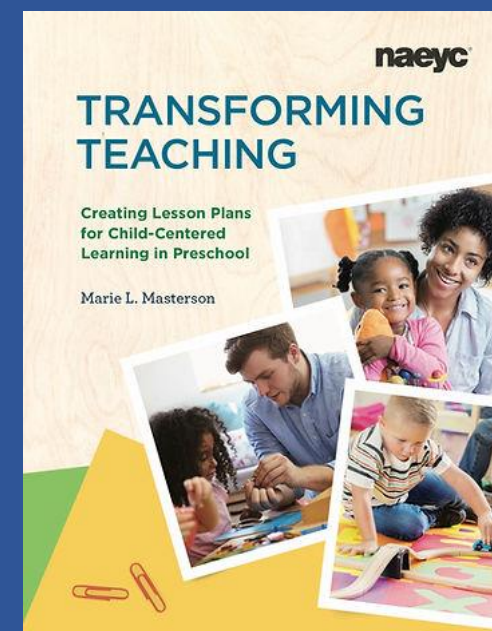
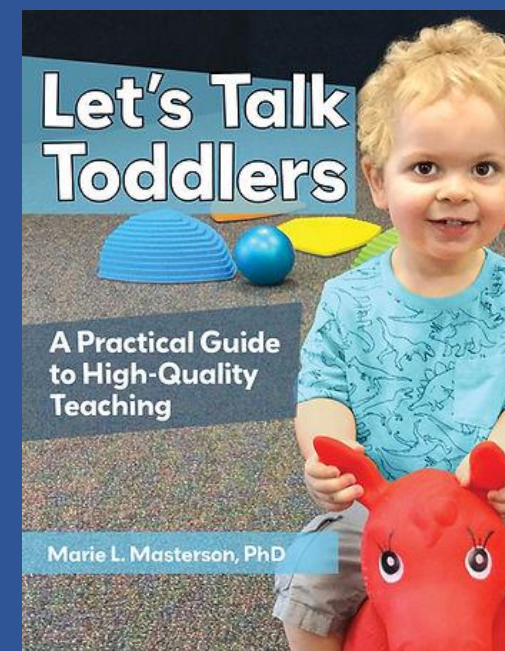
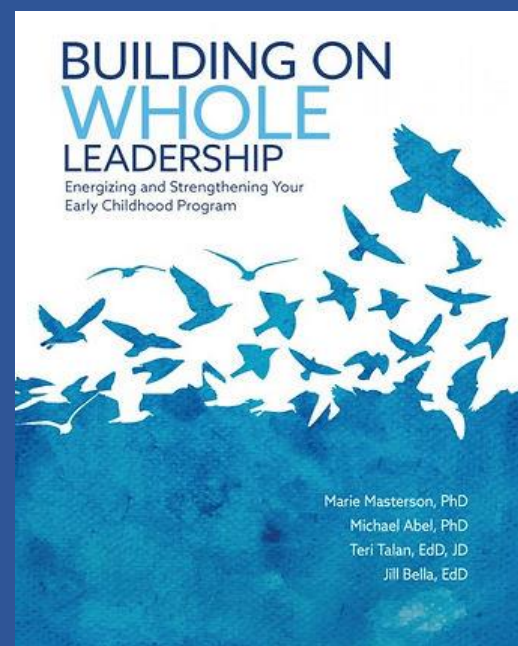
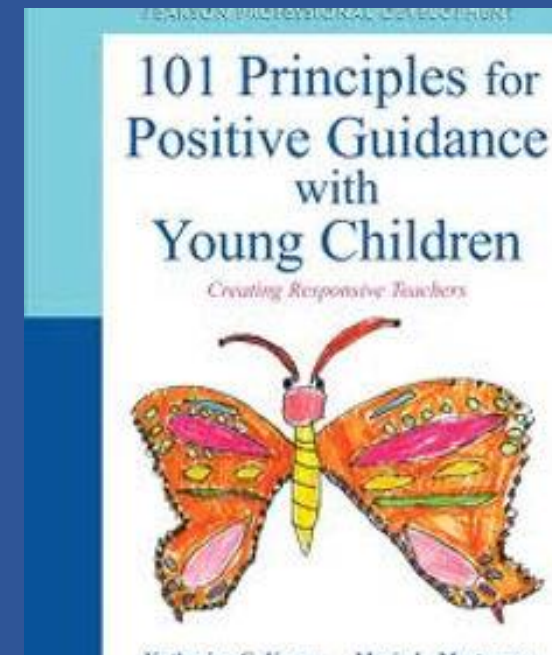
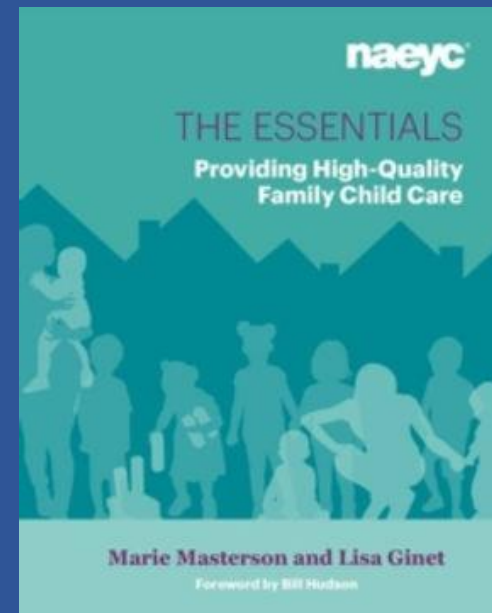
Activities from this  
Session – and  
More!



- Look for the upcoming NAEYC book:
- *Focus on Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Equitable & Joyful Learning with Infants and Toddlers*
- It's part of the NAEYC "Focus On" series.

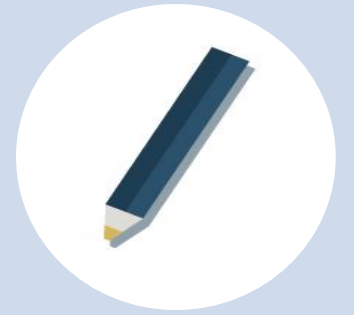


- Look for the upcoming 2025 book:
- *Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Care for Infants and Toddlers: Strategies for High-Quality Teaching*
- It's part of the Teachers College Press Early Childhood Education Series.



Practical tools  
to strengthen  
your impact.

# Shifting Mindsets and Overcoming Challenges



## OBJECTIVES

- Closing the gaps with DAP
- What we are seeing in the field
- Barriers and opportunities for equity and quality
- High-impact strategies that create change
- Strengthening professionalism and advocacy



## Attunement

Being with children in their world.

Seeing through the eyes of children...



The intentional awareness of children's experiences is called *attunement*, which involves a two-way transaction as both the teacher and child contribute (Walbam, 2023).



## Intersubjectivity

Showing children their inner personal experiences are worthy and sharable with others.

Creating space for culture sharing, where children are companions and cooperators.

Protecting sacred space for making meaning – affirming and learning about self and others.





## Intersubjectivity

The adult is:

Aware of the child's feelings, focus, and thinking (Gitz-Johnsen, 2022).

Affirming children's belonging and identity (Trevarthen, 1992).

Creating this physical and psychological space for belonging and caring about others as an important social justice issue that anchors children's sense of responsibility for self and others (Fleer, 2018).





## Intersubjectivity

What children don't experience personally, they don't know how to give to others. What they have wired into their relational brain becomes the anchor for future identity as a worthy, caring, resilient adult.



Children who experience love and affirmation are able to seek and give these in return, anchors of resilience.



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# Developmentally Appropriate Practice

1. I have participated in training and know about the DAP statement.
2. I have read the NAEYC Position Statement on DAP completely.
3. I have read the DAP 4<sup>th</sup> Edition book completely.
4. I have applied specific strategies/principles of DAP to my work.
5. I have created or updated trainings to include DAP in my work.

# Developmentally Appropriate Practice

## Three Core Considerations:

- Commonality
- Individuality
- Context

## Nine Principles:

NAEYC's guidelines and recommendations for developmentally appropriate practice are based on the nine principles and their implications for early childhood education professional practice.

# Developmentally Appropriate Practice

## Six Guidelines

**1** Creating a Caring, Equitable Community of Learners

**2** Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections

**3** Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning

**4** Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning

**5** Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to Achieve Meaningful Goals

**6** Demonstrating Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## Highlights for Infant and Toddler Teaching: DAP

- Responding to what is best for all children and for each child (both/and thinking).
- Resituating child development in context – cultural, linguistic, racial, ethnic, and social.
- Building on the contexts of families for meaningful, relevant, and respectful learning.



Especially needed with infants and toddlers!

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## Let's anchor our mindset with DAP

- Understanding children's well-being is situated in their identity and connection to family.
- Affirming and building on the assets of children and families – to create an inclusive, caring, equitable community of learners.
- Understanding impact – nurturing the critical years of development for a life-time of joyful learning.



Especially needed with infants and toddlers!

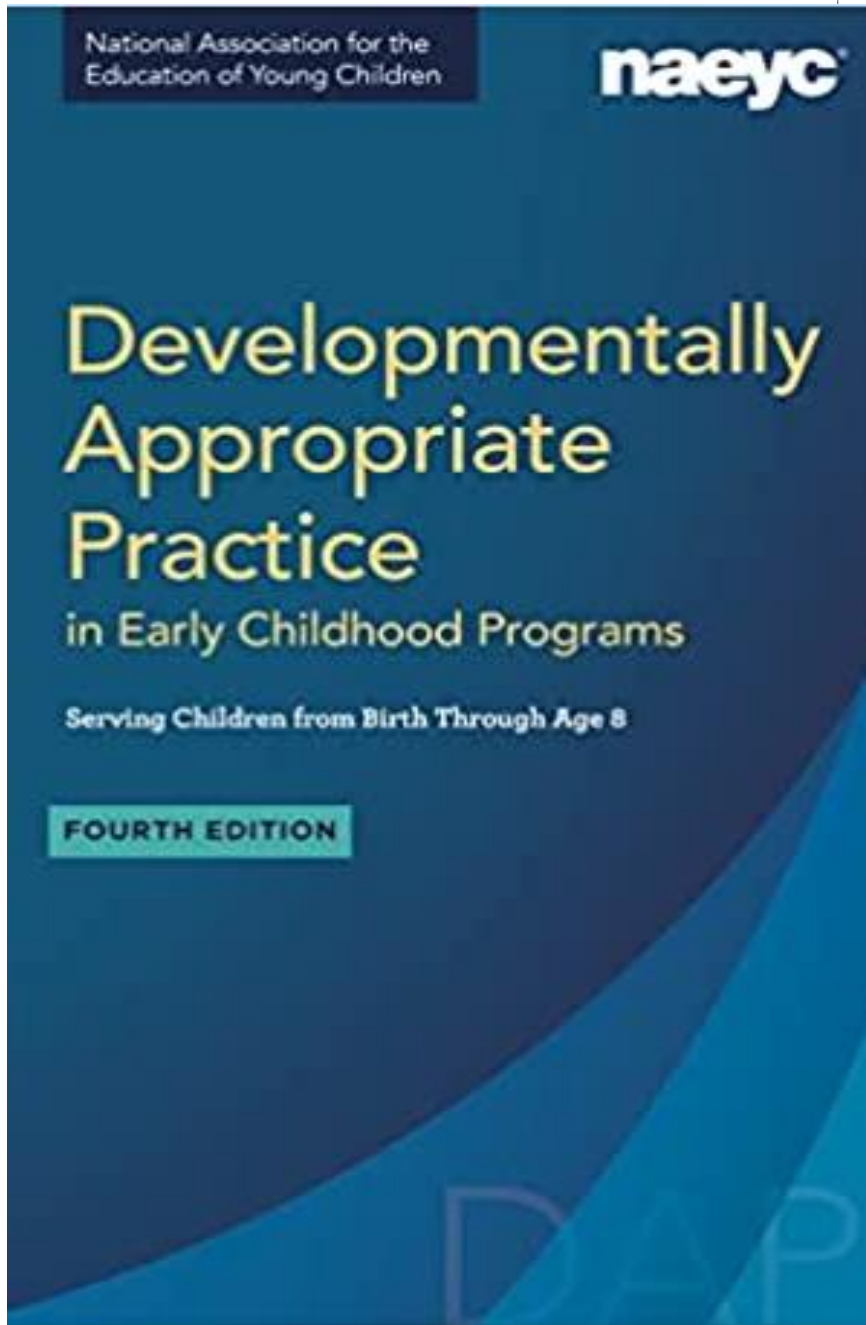
# ■ #1 Supporting Teachers: Let's Talk



1. If you could help infant or toddler teachers change one thing or you could change one thing, what would it be?
2. How do infant and toddler teachers most need support?
3. What's working well? Something you are doing that's had positive impact?

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## Action steps for all of us:


- Get DAP into the hands of teachers, leaders, coaches, and policy-makers.
- Share the NAEYC DAP and Equity Position Statements with programs.
- Advocate for local and state QIS to require DAP to be incorporated in approved trainings.





## OBJECTIVES

- Closing the gaps with DAP
- What we are seeing in the field?
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- Strengthening professionalism and advocacy



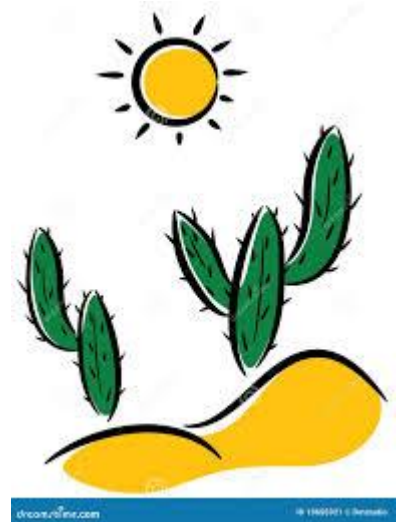
*Need to  
know for  
advocacy  
and training.*



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## What are we seeing in the field? Limited Access

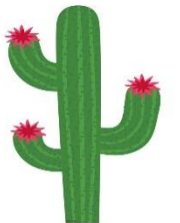
- **51%** of families live in child care deserts.
- A child care desert: Three or more children for each available slot.
- Some states have more than five children for every licensed slot, with low-income families having fewer options.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## What are we seeing in the field? Limited Access

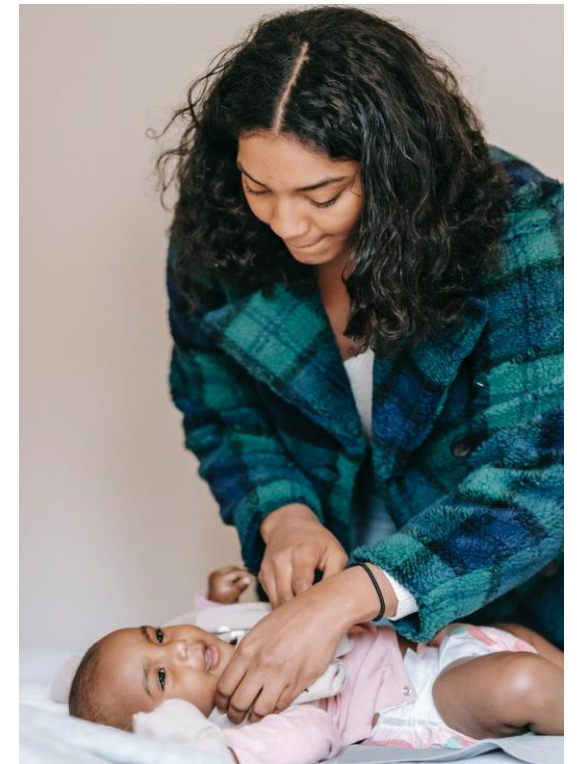
- Fewer than **one-fourth** of infants and toddlers across a sample including 19 states and Washington, D.C. could be served by the existing licensed child care supply (Center for American Progress, 2020).
- Illinois data reflects national trends, with fewer than 20 percent of infants and toddlers having access to licensed child care and only five percent having access to high-quality care (Raising Illinois, 2024).



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## What are we seeing in the field? High Turnover

- Infant and toddler teachers have the highest turnover rate in the field.
- **49%** of infant and toddler teachers leave their centers or the field each year (Bassock et al., 2022; Evidence of Teacher Turnover).

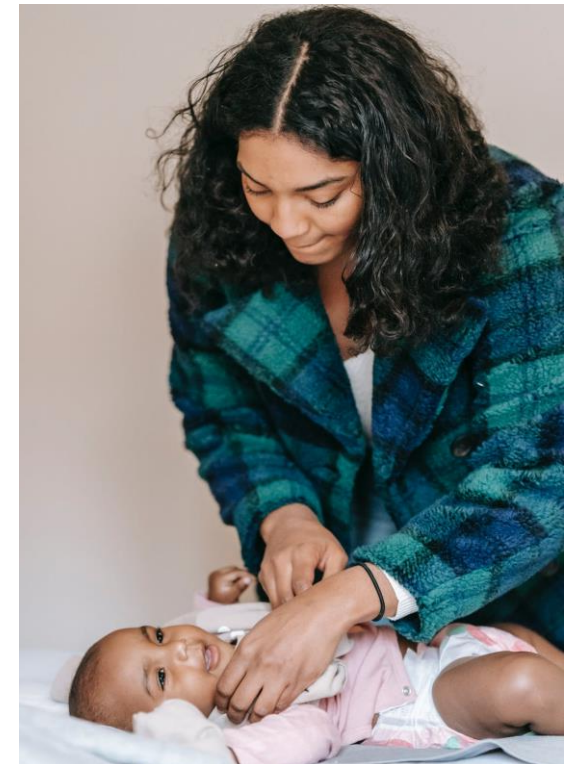


# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **What are we seeing in the field? High Turnover**

- 35% turnover if 0-3 only.
- 43% turnover if 0-5 only.
- 50% when serving birth to three with subsidies.
- 26-27% when serving birth to three without subsidies.

OPRE Report, March 2023



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

A 50% turnover rate has enormous implications:

- **Children:** Disrupts predictable relationships and individualized teaching.
- **Families:** Removes trustworthy and coordinated care.
- **Teachers:** Leaves an untrained workforce in need of critical training and preparation.
- **Leaders:** Introduces a crisis in staffing, weakens learning communities, and interrupts continuous quality improvement.
- **Trainers:** Causes “starting over” annually, rather than moving on to higher-level content.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## What are we seeing in the field? Quality

- 75% of toddlers in center care and 93% in home-based care are in low or mediocre quality care settings that can harm their development.
- Fewer than half of infants and toddlers in licensed care have the highest QIS ratings (Perlman et al., 2017).
- Overall, quality of care for infants and toddlers is low and variable (Mangione, et al., 2016). Only 10% of child care programs nationwide are rated as high-quality.

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## What are we seeing in the field? Quality

- Quality is low in programs serving low-income families (Bichay-Awadalla & Butotsky-Shearer, 2022).
- Families with high neighborhood violence, poverty, and ACEs are least likely to have access to high-quality programs (Coley, Speilvogel, Kruzik, et al., 2021).

APA. February 22, 2024: Living in violent neighborhoods affects children's brain development

Child Trends. May 15, 2024: Poverty Matters for Children's Well-being, but Good Policy Can Help

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## What are we seeing in the field? Quality

- Little meaningful talking. No talking during diapering and meals.
- Little personal conversation. Directions given to the group.
- Low level of challenge. Lacking well-planned curriculum and purposeful play.
- Little to no book reading – *of any kind* by teachers or children.
- Children waiting for extended time without interaction during play and transitions and when in cribs and high chairs.

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **What are we seeing in the field? Screening**

- 34.2% of children screened overall.
- 28.5% of children from low-income families screened (Cole et al., 2023).
- 6.8 % infants and toddlers with disabilities receiving early intervention services under IDEA Part C screened.
- 11% enrolled in Early Head Start screened (Zero to Three, 2023).

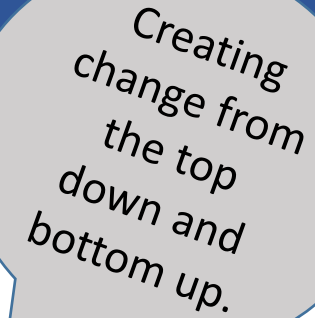


# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **What are we seeing in the field? Resources**

- 161 peer-reviewed papers (2009 and 2020) show infant and toddler teachers received fewer professional development supports than other early education teachers.
- Teachers in under-resourced communities have the fewest trainings (Lang et al., 2024, Teacher Inequities).
- Little curriculum is specifically developed for infants and toddlers (Smith & Osborn, 2024).

# Shifting to an Equity Lens



Creating change from the top down and bottom up.

## What can be change lever for teachers?

- Teachers who report high levels of connectedness with other staff, experience better supervisor support, and feel more control over their work report lower stress, provide higher quality care, and are ***less likely to leave their jobs*** (Mcmullen, 2020; Cassidy et al., 2017).

**See Handout:** Leading for Impact with Infants and Toddlers: High-Impact: Levers for Leadership, Teaching, and Advocacy

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## What can be a change lever for teachers?

- Incorporating trauma-informed leadership and teaching.
- Using reflective practice and reflective supervision.
- Making family engagement a priority.
- Building a vision for high-quality teaching.
- Stepping up into advocacy.

**See the Handout:** Leading for Impact with Infants and Toddlers: High-Impact: Levers for Leadership, Teaching, and Advocacy

## ■ #2 Reflecting on Data: Pair and Share



1. What surprised you about the data?
2. If you are a teacher, what kind of support do you really need from leaders and coaches?
3. If you are a leader or coach – what do you want to be doing to support teachers? Lessons learned? Take away action steps?



## OBJECTIVES

- Closing the gaps with DAP
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# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## Equity challenges for infant-toddler teachers

Bias infiltrates the work of infant and toddler teaching in a **unique way**, because ways of caring for children, beliefs about teaching, staff communication, perceptions of families, and expectations are **culturally determined**.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## Equity challenges for infant-toddler teachers

- Culture often guides teaching at the unconscious level.
- Differences are attributed to personality or choice.
- Families may not speak up because of...
  - Not recognizing hidden norms
  - Embarrassment
  - Fear of retaliation
  - Fear of leaving children
  - Can you think of others?



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## Equity challenges for infant-toddler teachers

Because of cultural values and beliefs:

- Teachers miss children's and family members cues.
- Assumptions and expectations are not accurate.
- Communication differences lead to misunderstanding.
- Co-teachers vary in understanding and approach.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## Equity challenges for infant-toddler teachers

- Bias impacts perceptions of and expectations for infants and toddlers, because **Western culture places a *high value on verbal communication***.
- Teachers expect families will tell them about family values and goals. But teachers must actively pursue hidden beliefs, values, and practices - and observe, listen to, and learn from families.

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## Equity challenges for infant-toddler teachers

Studies find that racial bias is less likely to be recognized in early childhood programs than in other settings. This is known as the “**bias blind spot**,” where we may recognize bias in others (and other places) but not in ourselves (Blackson et al., 2022).



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

Melinda Miller (2022, 31) provides helpful definitions:

- **Affinity bias** – We are more comfortable with people and practices similar to our own.
- **Attribution bias** – Discrediting success to luck rather than effort, resilience, or skill.
- **Perception bias** – Sticking with stereotypes or simplified ideas.
- **Confirmation bias** – Giving more weight to what confirms our own ideas.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **Equity challenges for infant-toddler teachers**

1. Carrying out sleeping routines. Co-sleeping, swaddling, timing.
2. Managing feeding requests. Control, restrictions, assistance, timing.
3. Elimination and potty training. Age, cues, verbal support.
4. Clothing practices. Swaddling, jewelry, cleanliness, gender.
5. Response to illness. Over or under concern, folk practices.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **Equity challenges for infant-toddler teachers**

- 6. Emotion support. Ways of verbal and physical support, anticipation.
- 7. Ways of communicating. Direct vs. indirect requests.
- 8. Socialization goals. Independence/dependence vs. individual/group.
- 9. Views about play. Risk, control, restriction, exploration.
- 10. Views about learning. Respect for teachers, creativity vs. structure.

Differences must be talked about and bias disrupted!



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **Equity challenges for infant-toddler teachers**

This unique space of interaction results in one of three outcomes.

Cultural norms and differences can be:

- **Hidden:** They remain unacknowledged and lead to families experiencing implicit bias, exclusion, and inequity.
- **Unexamined:** Signs are noticed, but ignored and lead to implicit bias, frustration, lowered expectations, and discrimination.
- **Overcome:** Issues are recognized, moved to action, and lead to humility, learning, trust, and authentic relationships with families, staff, and children.

# #3 Cultural Conflicts: Pair and Share



Describe a cultural conflict, norms or barrier that is

- **Hidden** in the program in which you lead, support, or teach.
- **Unexamined** in the program in which you lead, support or teach.
- **Overcome.** The program has recognized an issue and ***moved into action*** to gather staff, set an action plan – and create change.

What happened and what was the result?

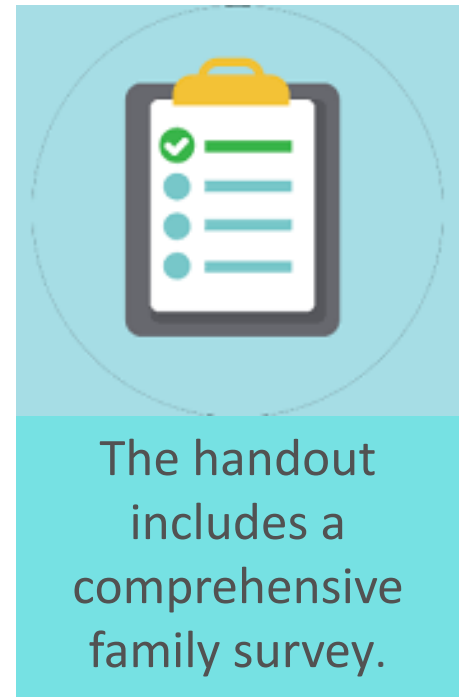
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# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## How can we overcome barriers to equity?

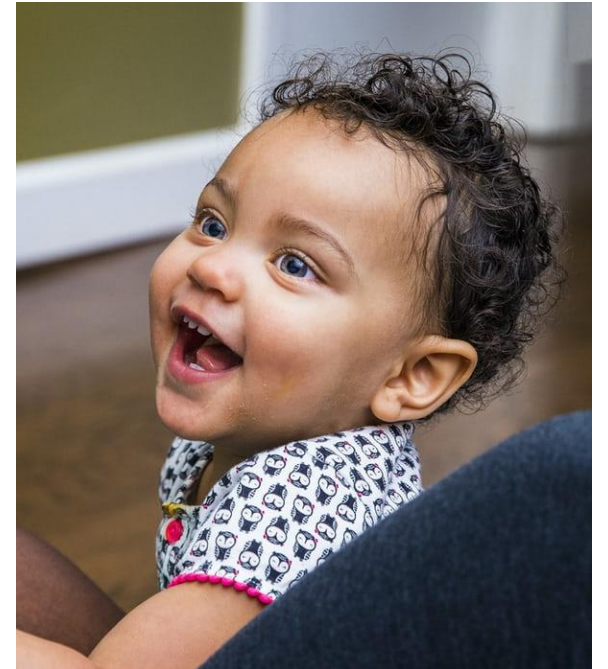
- Use a comprehensive family survey.
- Explore beliefs, cultural practices, and childrearing routines valued by the family.
- Focus on specific questions – exploring details about diapering, meals, sleeping, and other routines.
- Ask families to demonstrate – invite them to show what they prefer and how they interact.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **How can we overcome barriers to equity?**

- Make reflective practice a norm.
- Leaders – practice reflective supervision.
- Facilitate and require reflective exploration of staff cultures and beliefs, with explicit training about the dynamics present in teaching, contributions to bias, and practices required for equitable teaching.





## OBJECTIVES

- Closing the gaps with DAP
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# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

Check out the great observation checklist (High-Priority Strategies).

- ☐ Sit *on the floor* just inside your classroom. Observe, seeing through the eyes and experiences of the children.
- ☐ Where would you go first, if you were a child? What would be inviting to you?
- ☐ Are there a range of challenges in each play area?
- ☐ Is the space adequate for the number of children and materials?

As we explore the “Top 10” high-impact strategies, imagine observing one hour in a classroom. What do you see and hear?

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

1. Family engagement: **Teachers need training!**
  - What do we say and do at conferences?
  - Use the family survey to guide conversation.
  - Invite families to the classroom. When?  
What will that look like?

Such a critical need! Time to talk, reflect, and explicit and provide resources.

*We don't  
see this.*



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

### 2. Supervision: [Teachers need training!](#)

- Make a rule: No children left in cribs or high-chairs.
- Test visual sight-lines.
- Plan tasks (prepare food and materials ahead).
- Don't let children cry without intervention.

Such an important fix! Make a daily task list.  
Use a white board.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

What are  
children  
learning?

## High-Impact Strategies

### 3. Play: Teachers need training!

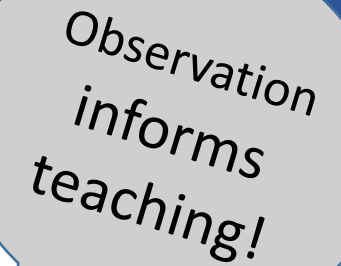
#### Activities:

- List the skills emerging for each child.
- List the learning goals for activities.
- What vocabulary, questions, and skills will the teacher model?



Such an important fix – Don't plan for what children are **doing**! Plan for what they are learning.

# Shifting to an Equity Lens



Observation  
informs  
teaching!

## High-Impact Strategies

### 4. Observation, documentation, and assessment

- Commercial apps should not **take the place** of other strategies.
- Each teacher needs a clipboard with names and space for notes.
- Take photos, videos, and use documentation boards.

Such an important fix! Share findings of observation with coteachers and families. Plan activities to strengthen (build on) the skills observed.

Technology is great – but it often removes personal interaction.

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

5. Language and literacy: [Teachers need training!](#)

- Frequently, we see **no books** read by teachers or used by children.
- We see meals, diaper changes, and transitions with ***no talking***.
- When there is talking, it is to guide behavior.
- We see singing only for group routines. No fingerplays.

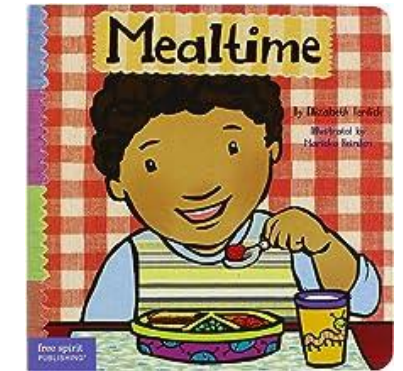
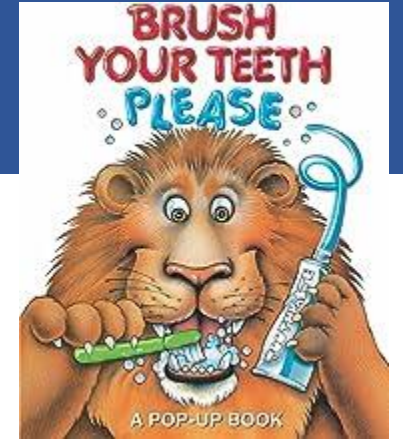
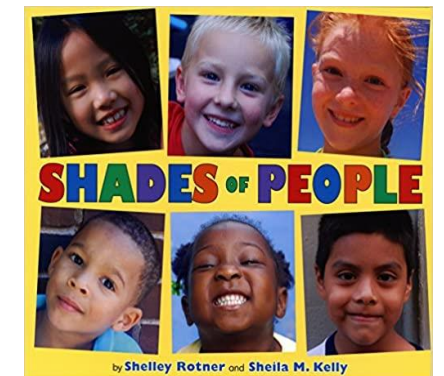
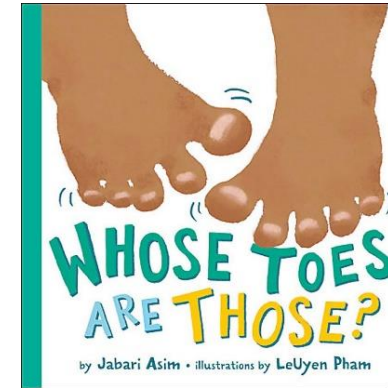
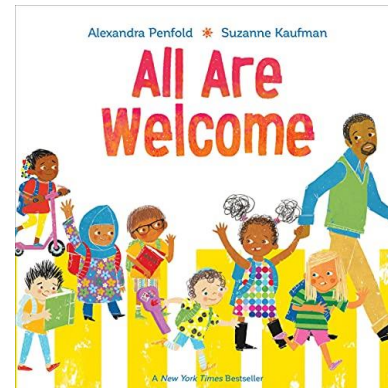
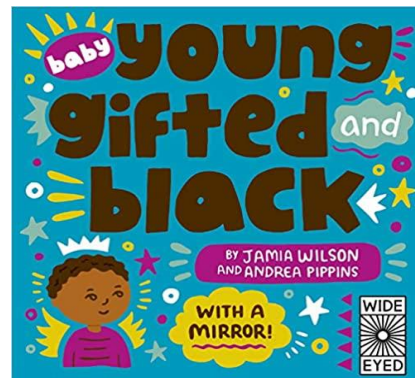
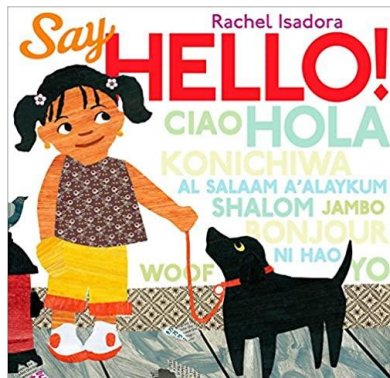


# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

5. Language and literacy: **What can we do?**

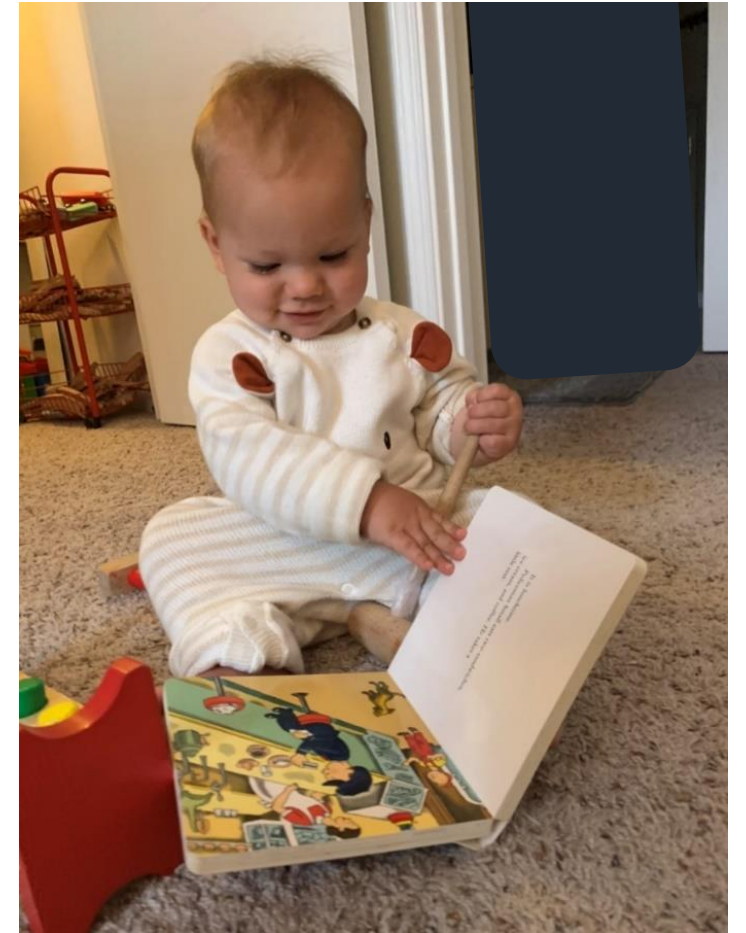
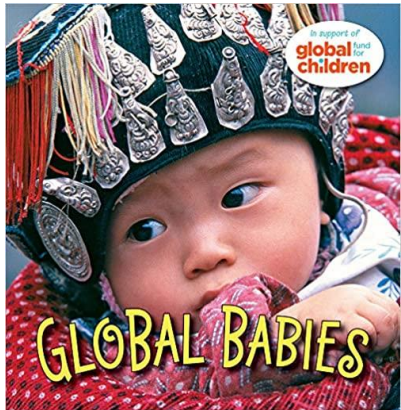
- Read daily about familiar activities.
- Read infant and toddler books with positive messages.
- Plan vocabulary and questions!



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

Infants who are read to will enjoy books on their own.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

5. Language and literacy: **Teachers need training!**

**Non-specific** words are **pronouns**. Replace with **nouns**.

- “Whatcha doin’?” (“You put the baby in the stroller. This baby looks cold. Do you want to cover the baby with a blanket?”)
- “How was it?” (“Did you like the bagel with cream cheese?”)
- “Put them in there.” (“Put the red shapes into the box.”)
- “Do you want this?” (“Do you want to play with the bear or the dog?”)

During a 3 hour observation...  
This is how we know teachers need training!

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

### 5. Language and literacy

- Use descriptive words. (“Delighted means happy! That’s an enormous elephant. Enormous means big!”).
- Talk with children during routines, diaper changes, meals.
- For multi-lingual resources, see: NAEYC, Early Edge California, Zero to Three, WIDA



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

### 6. Inclusive, Anti-Bias Teaching

- Move beyond spaghetti in the housekeeping area.
- Ensure positive messages in conversations, images, and expectations.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

### 7. Social-Emotional Teaching

- Model and narrate **empathy** to children.
  - “It’s okay. I’ll help you get dry.”
  - “Robert looks sad. Let’s read with him.”
  - “Trina looks lonely. Let’s sit with her.”
  - “I know you feel sad. It’s okay to feel sad.”

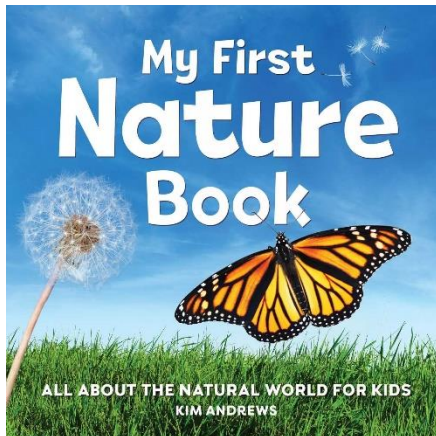


# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

### 8. Creative and Sensory Play

- Offer creative arts, nature, and sensory experiences daily!
- Make art materials available daily. Toddlers LOVE to use an easel!



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

### 9. Behavior Guidance: Part of the ***bigger picture!***

- Connected relationships and attuned supervision.
- Appropriately challenging activities.
- Stimulation monitored (noise, activity level, soothing).
- Physical activity (2.5 miles/3 hrs. daily toddlers).
- Consistent routines and expectations.
- Co-regulation, because infants and toddlers don't self-regulate.

Behavior guidance means to strengthen skills. You can't impact behavior without meeting basic foundations.

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

Behavior guidance means to strengthen skills.

### 9. Behavior Guidance: Teachers need training!

1. Model – Use a respectful tone; ask before touching bodies and things.
2. Redirect behavior in a way that children experience success.
3. Keep instructions simple. Prepare children for what's next.
4. Use assisted soothing and trauma informed practices.
5. Teach and support manners. “We push in our chair when we are finished.” “We say thank you.”

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High Impact Strategies

### 9. Behavior Guidance for Challenging Behaviors

#### *Reasons:*

- **Overstimulation.** Intervene early.
- **Frustration.** Show how to get help.
- **Lack of Consistency.** Expectations – same every time.
- **Anxiety.** Affirm with strengths-based messages. “You can do it. I’ll help you.”

#### *Responses:*

- **Comfort/Calm.** Breathe, sit quietly, and use calming techniques.
- **Contain.** Confine the event within limits, reassure, and explain.
- **Connect.** Move forward with meaningful activity.

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## High-Impact Strategies

### 10. Trauma Informed Teaching

All children benefit from a trauma-informed approach (self-calming, co-regulation, predictability, safety, consistency).

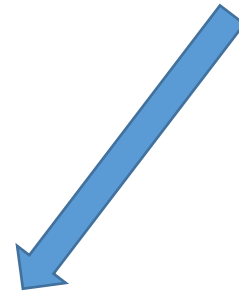
- View behavior guidance through stress mediation lens.
- Offer quiet activities, soothing music, and protected spaces.
- Use gentle touch and repetitive motion.



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

**Please use these practical handouts in your work:**

- Strategy Toolbox for Teachers: Creating Joyful Learning
- Behavior Guidance with Infants and Toddlers
- Family Survey: Culturally Responsive Communication
- High-Priority Teaching Strategies
- High-Impact Levers for Leaders



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## ■ #4 Key Strategies: Think About It



1. What are the most important strategies for teaching and behavior guidance?
2. How do teachers inadvertently work against the goals they hope to achieve?
3. What can program leaders and coaches do to support teachers on the most important priorities? What are our next steps?



## OBJECTIVES

- Closing the gaps with DAP
- What we are seeing in the field
- Barriers and opportunities for equity and quality
- High-impact strategies that create change
- Strengthening professionalism and advocacy



# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **High Impact Strategies:** Professionalism

To strengthen teaching – we have to strengthen teachers.

1. Incorporate a trauma-informed approach with staff.
2. Plan regular staff meetings – with inclusive reflection.
3. Share mental health and counseling resources, community programs, and public benefits, such as food programs, federal assistance, and local sources for food, clothing, health and wellness, and housing.

# Shifting to an Equity Lens

## **High Impact Strategies: Advocacy**

1. Invite your local newspaper to highlight outstanding child care programs in your community.
2. Ask your state quality improvement system to incorporate developmentally appropriate practice as the pathway to equity and inclusive practice.
3. Join local and state efforts to advocate on behalf of infants, toddlers, families, and teachers – worthy of great investment.



## ■ #5 Closing the Gap: Think About It



1. What can we do together to strengthen infant and toddler teachers and teaching?
2. How can we close the gap between what is – and where we want to be?
3. How can we use DAP as the anchor to revitalize infant and toddler teaching?

How to  
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