

Health Education

Accomplished early childhood teachers are committed to promoting young children's health and well-being, and they place children's well-being at the center of the health curriculum. Teachers know that wellness results from the integration of the physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social, and moral-ethical domains, and that daily practice of the basic health skills of communication, decision making, goal setting, stress management, and conflict resolution helps young children to be healthy. Accomplished teachers understand that good health supports children's progress in all areas of development and learning.

Accomplished early childhood teachers plan positive routines for play, work, rest, hygiene, and social interaction throughout the day. They implement skill-based instruction in health during play, meal, rest, and transition times. Teachers educate young children about their need for movement and play and help them develop effective strategies for maintaining wellbeing. Accomplished teachers teach and model daily health habits in nutrition, safety, hygiene, physical activity, relationships, rest, and quiet time.

Accomplished teachers plan opportunities for young children to explore the unifying concepts of health, such as the influences of families, peers, media, culture, technology, prevention, and habits, to inform their health practices. Through

instruction augmented by cues to action and ongoing feedback, teachers provide young children with opportunities to practice daily routines for personal health. For example, teachers may cue children to set goals for how many fruits and vegetables to eat every day and set goals for brushing teeth twice a day. They also encourage children to verbalize their needs, wants, and feelings in healthy ways, and have children differentiate when to make health-related decisions individually or with trusted adults and community helpers.

Accomplished teachers use instructional strategies such as graphic organizers, checklists, and hypothetical situations to help young children think about their personal health choices such as refusing offers of tobacco and alcohol or dialing 911 in emergencies. When young children are encouraged to share their reasons for healthy behaviors, they may be more likely to reduce health risks. Teachers might also use cooperative learning, problem-based learning, or service learning to support health practices across the curriculum and advocate for personal, family, and community health.

Accomplished early childhood teachers are committed to ensuring children's safety. They equip children with the skills and knowledge to be safe on the playground, in the classroom, at home, in their neighborhoods, and online. They shield children from harm and readily educate and warn them about unsafe activities and hazards in the immediate environment. Accomplished teachers might use role-playing, discussions, or modeling to empower children to say no to safety hazards, inappropriate touches, or unsafe acts.

Accomplished early childhood teachers are aware of patterns of behavior that indicate health-related issues, and they are alert to any shifts in young children's behavior, appearance, emotions, or academic performance that may signal problems. If they notice any potential warning signs, they follow up with detailed observation and then talk with children and, as appropriate, with families. Teachers pay close attention to children's health questions and concerns. They cautiously evaluate situations and then, based on their interpretation of the information they have gathered, they determine appropriate next steps. Teachers access up-to-date health-related information, products, and services to promote child health, and they team with other health and educational professionals to coordinate the necessary supports for each child.

Accomplished early childhood teachers reach out to families to promote healthy habits for young children and communicate with families to share information on developmentally appropriate health habits and wellness routines. Accomplished teachers can inform parents about the latest findings on the role that health plays on cognitive growth and development. They encourage parents to set goals to reduce the number of hours children spend in passive play with media and to increase the time children spend being active in order to increase focus and to reduce stress. Accomplished teachers work with families to encourage children to get sufficient sleep and adequate nutrition in order to be alert and ready for learning.

Physical Education

Accomplished early childhood teachers know that physical education has an important impact on the development of the whole child. They understand that gross- and fine-motor skill development, healthy lifestyles, body coordination, and social skill development are essential to growth. They are familiar with research showing that physical fitness supports children's academic progress, improves posture, and helps address the issues of childhood obesity, attention to task, and classroom behavior. Teachers provide well-balanced physical education programs in order to promote the well-being of children including lifelong physical fitness. They are advocates for physical education and ensure that children engage in movement activities through informal as well as formal means. For example, young children might explore shapes made by their bodies while balancing on one arm and one leg, or might move with varying speeds through circular pathways while manipulating a ball or scarf. Accomplished teachers might engage students individually or in groups to explore other movement concepts using equipment, props, artwork, stories, and music to inspire movement.

Accomplished early childhood teachers are familiar with the essential principles of physical education including intensity, frequency, duration, and patterns of movement. They know that children typically use a variety of games, sports, dance, and fitness activities to express energy and emotions and to explore body awareness. Accomplished teachers use direct instruction with specific feedback to help children practice and integrate a variety of psychomotor skills such as running, walking, skipping, kicking, and jumping. Accomplished teachers provide a variety of physical activities to increase children's coordination, balance, agility, spatial orientation, sensory development, and kinesthetic awareness. For example, they might use stability balls and balance boards to stimulate the body in ways that increase opportunities for sensory integration, which in turn maximizes children's growth and development. Children who are active on a daily basis can increase their confidence and understanding of who they are and how they grow.

Accomplished early childhood teachers provide sufficient time and varied settings for children's physical activities in the classroom and beyond, such as during recess, physical education, and outdoor field days. Teachers of younger children know that appropriate and frequent periods of physical activity are essential for developing fine- and gross-motor skills, including cognitive skills, and for satisfying the young child's need to be active. Teachers are creative and imaginative in seizing opportunities to have children dance, mimic animal movements and move during transition times by hopping, crawling, or dancing to the next activity. They ensure that children have appropriate supervision, and they model physical activity patterns for children.

Accomplished early childhood teachers recognize that children have different needs and limitations and that no two children are at the same level of physical development at the same time. Teachers accept children as they are and give them the experiences and opportunities necessary to learn the skills they need. Teachers work with physical educators, physical therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, and parents to provide movement and fitness opportunities for all children.

Accomplished teachers also help all children understand how to work and play with others who have physical or sensory limitations.

Accomplished early childhood teachers understand that games and sports help to teach rules and regulations as well as dispositions for cooperation, respect, and sportsmanship. Teachers provide time for cooperative and competitive games, outdoor play, movement relays, and free-choice activities as important ways to increase personal and social interactions and to help release tension in an enjoyable context.