

Needs of Young Children

This document explains the needs young children have. Suggestions are offered as to how teachers can work towards meeting these needs.

Supporting Kindergarten

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Whatever their backgrounds, all children have similar needs. These needs may be described as:

- a need to feel a sense of trust, security, and competence
- a need to know, to reason, and to solve problems
- a need to be creative
- a need to develop holistically
- a need to share experiences with other children and adults.

Children need to feel a sense of trust, security, and competence.

Children need to develop a sense of trust in themselves and others. If they feel secure in an environment that is comfortable and supportive, they will dare to be themselves, to explore what they might become, to make mistakes and learn to accept the consequences without their confidence being destroyed. They will learn to adjust to new situations and share ideas while maintaining their individuality. In this way, they establish a sense of competence.

Children need to feel free of guilt and uncertainty, and free to develop and grow at their own pace. They need to feel confident that someone cares about them and that they can learn. They need to feel accepted and affirmed.

Teachers should plan a physical and emotional environment in which children can try new ideas and skills, and apply what they have learned. Teachers need to accept and value each child. It is necessary to make provision for each child to grow and flourish at her or his own rate in a safe, supportive environment where the child feels some ownership and empowerment.

Teachers should foster the children's development of relationships with ideas, the environment, and people. Through these relationships, children can be encouraged to share their ideas and insights.

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Children have a need to know, to reason, and to solve problems.

Children need to play and explore because this is the way they come to know and understand the world about them. They need to have a chance to describe what they see and do, solve problems, and evaluate what they see and hear. They need to experiment with, explore, and manipulate materials. They need to become careful observers, reflect on their observations, and be challenged beyond their observations in order to develop the knowledge, values, skills, and processes which enable independent learning.

Children need to learn sensitivity and responsiveness to the environment. They need to become flexible so that they can accept challenges and changes without becoming frustrated by doubts, failures, and uncertainties in a changing world. They need to be able to plan ahead and anticipate consequences.

Teachers should provide a variety and range of resources and materials. Teachers should design the schedule with uninterrupted blocks of time to allow for exploration and experimentation, and support individual choice from a range of activities, materials, or equipment. Opportunities to set short term goals encourage students to develop planning skills. Assessing the outcome of those goals provides students with practice in anticipating consequences.

The environment should be purposefully and intentionally created to facilitate play, exploration, and discovery. The use of open-ended materials will enable children to solve problems in unique and new ways.

Children need to be creative.

In order to be creative, children need to store their perceptions of the world around them in the form of images. They need opportunities to identify and express their emotional feelings by participating in dramatic play, sharing stories with other children, enjoying music, and working with art materials. They need people to listen to them and respond to what they say. They need to develop the ability to explain things to others and to persist in the expression of their ideas.

Teachers should make sure that consumables (paper, markers, pencils, etc.) are in many places within the classroom. Scheduling continuous blocks of time will allow children to complete creations. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to share their creativity by designating display space, having “performance” opportunities during group time, and encouraging children to interact with others both inside and outside the classroom.

Stimulating and dynamic environments fosters the creative spirit in children. Materials should stimulate the children’s imagination and create a sense of wonder and curiosity, enabling children to construct their own understandings of the world.

Children need to develop holistically.

Children find identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to people, places, values, and beliefs. Children develop at different rates and in different ways. Opportunities to develop holistically enable children to develop intellectually, physically, socio-emotionally, and spiritually at their own pace. Children need time to develop intellectually, to analyze materials, ideas, and situations, to be reflective, and to apply criteria. Physically, children need to develop coordination, to become spatially aware, and to have opportunities to be physically active. Developing a positive sense of self, respecting and valuing others, and the ability to resolve conflicts are skills young children need to develop. Spiritually, children begin to explore cultural traditions, become aware of an inner self, and make connections to the world.

Teachers should provide children with integrated learning opportunities. These integrated learning opportunities should incorporate all four of the domains (intellectual, physical, socio-emotional, and spiritual). Opportunities for growth and development should be occurring daily.

Children need to share experiences with other children and adults.

Children need to feel they are part of a community. They need to talk and listen to other children and to adults. They need opportunities to watch others and imitate what they do. They need a chance to test different ways of interacting with others and see the consequences of their actions. Children need to find out that other people do not always think the same way they do, or see things from the same perspective. They need a chance to try out other people's roles, learn to take turns, and share equipment with others.

Teachers should provide opportunities for children to play/interact with both peers and adults. They should provide several centres that encourage role play and development of social skills. Teachers may see the need to model social skills such as how to enter a group or how to interact at a party. Some children may not have acquired such skills prior to Kindergarten.

Relationships are opportunities for teachers to learn more about the children. Knowing about children's prior experiences and knowledge as well as each child's personal interests are help to facilitate scaffolding and the learning process. It is important that teachers are respectful of each child's experiences, culture, and family.