

To: All Staff, Lab Students and Volunteers

From: Sara Sanders, Assistant Director

Re: Working with Infants and Toddlers

Welcome to the SDSU Children's Center, a quality service provided by Associated Students. We are pleased to have you working with our program, and are committed to making your time with us valuable. This letter is to help point out important things to know when working with our youngest children (Infants and Toddlers).

Our Infants and Toddlers range in age from 6-24 months. This is a time where developmental stages and changes can happen at an extremely rapid pace. Working with Infants and Toddlers is **very** different from working with Preschool aged children. Infants have little language to help us understand what they need. Crying is a natural way to express an unmet need-it is how babies communicate with their caregivers. It is normal for infants to cry when their parents drop them off. Children are always more attached to their parents than they are to teachers or caregivers, so they do miss them when they are separated. When caring teachers show children they will do all they can to meet their needs, children begin to develop trust for other adults in their lives. If you are ever faced with wondering what is the best thing to do, please ask a Master or Supervising Teacher. Your extra pairs of hands will be much needed during the busy times of day.

Children at **6 months old** are very dependent on adults to have their needs met. They are just beginning to sit up and babble. They may be getting ready to crawl by rocking back and forth on hands and knees. Children need custodial care such as diapering, feeding, and playing in safe and healthy ways. The staff at the Children's Center strives to go well beyond just custodial care as well as providing loving guidance in a way that develops young minds and bodies. Infants and Toddlers are always learning-from the environment, each other, and the adults in their daily lives. Infants need flexibility. They need to eat and sleep when they are hungry or tired. They live by their own clocks. As they grow, we can begin to move them toward a more typical schedule.

It is important to stay calm when working with young children. Let them do things in their own way on their own time whenever possible. We try to "stand back" to see if children can resolve problems before stepping in their way. We certainly offer guidance and support as needed, and always keep children safe, but find that they are often very capable of figuring out what needs to happen. To help support this development, we have children work in small groups, so they can better learn to cooperate and form bonds. Always remember the importance of visually seeing all children within the small group you are working with and/or those who are in the area where you are working. Whenever possible, please position yourself so that children are not playing behind you or if you must have your back to a child, be sure another staff member can visually see the child you cannot see yourself.

At **9 months old**, infants are pulling themselves up and "cruising" around furniture. It is important to let them explore, but stay close for the inevitable tumble. Infants are extremely top heavy, and it takes a long time to develop the muscles needed to hold their heads and necks in a stable way. Infants will also be babbling (pre-speaking) at this age. Use every opportunity to talk to them, describing what they are doing and what they see.

Once children reach **12 months old**, many of them are walking, and they are extremely busy. Safety becomes more of a focus when children can access all areas of the classroom and outside. They are learning, learning, learning, and want to put their new skills to the test. It is difficult to

anticipate what mobile infants have in mind, but the more time spent with them, the easier it gets to anticipate their actions. Keep in mind they can be very ***FAST*** and have short attention spans. When you communicate with young children, it is important to get down on their level, and to use their names.

Young infants cannot work out many problems on their own-they need loving adults to provide help and guidance. They also should not be expected to wait for more than a few seconds between activities. They need to move and climb and can usually recover their moods fairly quickly. Just as crying is typical behavior for young infants, so tantrumming is developmentally appropriate for older infants. It is natural for children to become upset when what they want to do and what they are capable of doing are different. If you can, it is always best to just let the tantrum finish, and to help the child move on to another activity. Whenever possible, plan ahead. Have enough toys, space and activities planned so children don't have to share or wait. One year olds need to be watched very closely, and also need plenty of time to adjust and transition from one activity to another.

18 month old Toddlers want to be independent, but are not at all ready to be left alone. Help them do what they can do, give them chances to try, but pay attention to the safety factor. Find out the few simple rules each classroom uses, "Feet on the floor," "Chairs are for our bottoms," and be sure to use the same words with the children. Repetition is how children learn-so be prepared to say the same things over and over. Show, rather than tell what you expect.

Young children need the opportunity to play outside everyday, weather permitting. Children can move their bodies more freely outside, and overcrowding is often followed by fussiness. Continue to talk with the children-they can understand words way before they can speak them.

2 year olds are not "Terrible"-they are inexperienced. They are busy, fast, and curious about everything. It is hard for them to "shift gears" between one activity and another, so give them plenty of time. It is easy to see them as more grown up than they actually are. This is typically the age group when children learn to use the potty independently. Twos understand many more words than they can use. They have limited self control and are extremely self-centered. They can attend to activities for no more than 5 minutes at a time. They are only just beginning to want to get along with others, and still play more often near, rather than with friends. Safety is so important in the younger years because children have not yet developed their sense of whether or not they are putting themselves in danger.

Put yourself in the room or outdoor play spaces in such a way that you can see the children and their activities you have been assigned. Be aware of the whole group as well so that if a new child moves into your area, you are able to see and assist that child as needed as well. Take cues from the language used by the teaching staff. When in doubt about how to handle a situation or have a concern or question, do not hesitate to ask the Master Teacher or another co-teacher in the classroom. We want this to be a valuable experience for you, and we can help you navigate the sometimes confusing world of Infants and Toddlers.

RETURN BOTTOM PORTION TO YOUR COTTAGE SUPERVISING TEACHER:

I have read the letter above providing special insight into working with infants, toddlers and twos.

Name: _____ DATE _____

Are you: CC Staff SDSU CFD Student Community College Student Other: _____

Signature: _____