



CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

A character education component in an early childhood curriculum is at the heart of the curriculum in the first five years of life. It strives to build in each child a positive sense of self as the basic core of positive mental health and motivation for learning. During activities or routines, all interactions affecting the behavior, thoughts, feelings, and actions that occur between each child and the important adults in his/her life can be seen as opportunities to build positive character.

Research has demonstrated that in the early years, positive relationships built on trust between children and responsive adults are the key to building positive character development. Additionally, adults who model positive behaviors set examples that teach children through basic language and actions the core characteristics of such concepts as cooperation, courtesy, diligence, empathy, forgiveness, generosity, helpfulness, honesty, hope, justice, kindness, loyalty, patience, perseverance, respect, responsibility, self-awareness, self-discipline, and tolerance. The concepts of love, trust and friendship are central to character development and are internalized through these early relationships.

In order to be considered a ***comprehensive*** Character Development Curriculum in an early childhood setting, the following criteria should be present:

- a. Caregivers are trained in relationship-based care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers including the emotional/psychological and developmental concerns of different stages of development.
- b. The curriculum uses intentional, proactive and effective approaches to character development. The character development component is prevalent in all activities throughout the day and changes with individual need and level of development.
- c. The curriculum strives to foster self-motivation and positive self-esteem in all children through the caregiver's awareness of the effects of words and actions
- d. Provides preschoolers with opportunities for moral action, a process for implementing civic and global values when making decisions; including an interest and positive disposition towards cultural differences.

- e. Children are given multiple opportunities to see how their behavior, actions, and words affect others and to think about ways to solve problems
- f. Fosters positive peer recognition by encouraging behavior consistent with core values and ethical decision making by all members of the school community.
- g. Engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort, recognizing that parents are the first and most important teachers of character.
- h. Respects the uniqueness of each family's composition, cultures and values as they engage them in shared activities to promote character-building.
- i. Encourages resiliency which enables children to cope with daily stress factors in a positive way and to overcome risk factors such as developmental delays, disabilities, divorce, abuse, poverty, etc.
- j. Provides children with activities (where appropriate) that encourage working together, sharing, cooperation, and language that expresses feelings.,
- k. Uses literature and language activities to teach pro-social behaviors and engage children in making choices, decisions, evaluating the behavior of storybook characters with opportunities to change outcomes.
- l. Provides caregivers with tools for self-evaluation and individual assessment of children's behavior.

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