



Tips for Tots



Tip #4: **Managing Mixed Age Groups**

Strategies

Did you know?

High quality ‘mixed-age group’ care, can enhance children’s social and emotional development. In ‘mixed-age group’ settings preschool and school age children have opportunities to lead, instruct, assume responsibilities, and nurture others. As they model appropriate behaviors, offer leadership, and support less mature and knowledgeable group members they also strengthen their own skills. Through shared interactions, activities, and experiences older children learn empathy and patience. They also develop a healthy self-esteem, and have opportunities to experience another’s point of view. In ‘mixed-age group’ settings siblings can remain together and close relationships are formed between caregiver, children, and their families. Infants and toddlers are exposed to more complex play, advanced language and are able to learn a wide range of skills by observing, copying and participating in activities with siblings, other children of various ages, and caregivers.

- When possible, use mealtimes as an opportunity for all the children to socialize and be together.
- Help younger children notice other’s feelings. Older children can be models for younger children as they increasingly express their feelings through words, rather than behaviors.
- Create opportunities for all children to cooperate in a variety of daily tasks and routines, making use of their individual abilities. Younger children can help with cleaning up while older children can help with setting the table or serving younger children.
- Encourage children of all ages to offer and accept comfort from each other when they are hurt or sad. Younger children may offer a hug and older children may offer encouragement.
- Build into the daily routine time and space where children can be by themselves or with one other child. Additionally, include experiences and materials older children can enjoy separate from younger children.
- Talk about similar interests and experiences between older and younger children. Focus on and acknowledge each child’s strengths and talents.
- Encourage older children to think of ways to include younger children in their activities such as finding roles for them in their dramatic play.
- Use conflicts as opportunities to help children learn to problem solve by using their words, listening to others and together reaching a solution. Children who are not fairly matched may need your help through this process.
- Limit “all together” approach to activities such as whole group book reading. Instead offer projects where everyone can contribute. Ex. offer finger painting with an edible medium or dancing to music. Encourage and support children to participate based on their ability.
- Offer materials that can be used in a variety of ways by children of different ages & skill levels. Ex. balls, play dough, boxes, blocks, arts and craft materials. As children mature they will use the materials in increasingly complex ways.

Resources:

The Case for Multiage Grouping in Early Childhood Education by Katz, Evangelou & Hartman
<http://ncac.acecqa.gov.au/educator-resources/factsheets/>
<http://childcarebridge.com/2011/06/activity-ideas-for-mixed-age-groups/>

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