

Description of the 8 CDA Content Areas

1. Planning a safe, healthy environment to invite learning;

Today, there are many things individuals can do to safeguard and improve their health. Understanding the interconnectedness of health, safety, and nutrition is fundamental because each component has an impact on the others and ultimately influences the achievement of good health. Lifestyle choices—such as what we eat, the safety practices we follow, whether or not we exercise daily, what types of preventive medical care we utilize, and even where we live—contribute to our overall health status.

Because most behaviors are learned, it is important to help young children establish healthy habits and make wise decisions from the earliest years. It is also important for teachers to work in partnership with parents, reinforcing the concepts they are teaching the children and keeping them informed of new developments related to children's health, safety, and nutrition.

Teachers and parents play a significant role in young children's lives by providing them with quality care, good nutrition, safe environments, needed medical care, early learning experiences, and the nurturing they need to become healthy adults.

2. Steps to advance children's physical and intellectual development;

Physical development and intellectual development are essential parts of the total development of children.

Developing physically includes using your fine and gross motor skills. Large or gross motor include running, jumping, hopping, skipping and any other movement that involves moving the arms, legs, torso, or whole body. Small or fine motor includes lacing, tying, feeding, weaving, and other movement that involves controlling the eyes, mouth, hands and feet. Teachers need to provide materials, equipment, and indoor/outdoor activities that will strengthen the development of these muscles.

Developing intellectually/cognitively includes a child's thinking abilities expanding and becoming more flexible. Teachers have to structure lessons to allow preschoolers to actively explore so they can try and understand the world around them. Create opportunities for them to manipulate real objects, imitate adults and other children in a variety of roles, and repeat and practice their learning.

3. Positive ways to support children's social and emotional development;

All children need a physically and emotionally secure environment that supports their developing self-knowledge, self-control, and self-esteem and, at the same time, encourages respect for the feelings and rights of others. Knowing one's self includes knowing about one's body, feelings, and abilities. It also means identifying one's self as a girl or boy and a member of a family and a larger cultural community. Accepting and taking pride in one's self comes from experiencing success and being accepted by others as a unique individual. Self-esteem develops as children master new abilities, experience success as well as failure, and realize their effectiveness in handling increasingly challenging demands in their own ways.

3. Positive ways to support children's social and emotional development;

Children need to develop social skills that help them work and play cooperatively and productively with other children and adults. To do this, children need to feel secure about themselves, value other people, and enjoy positive social interaction. A part of successfully interacting socially is knowing what behavior is appropriate or acceptable in a situation. Children develop this understanding when consistent limits and realistic expectations of their behavior are clearly and positively defined. Understanding and following simple rules can help children develop self-control. Children feel more secure when they know what is expected of them and when adult expectations realistically take into account each child's development and needs.

4. Strategies to establish productive relationships with families;

Preschool children move back and forth from family to the child care program more independently than younger children. They are also more sensitive to the differences between the two environments and observe interactions between their parents and caregivers carefully. Parents and caregivers should keep each other informed of important developments in the children's lives and provide mutual support in nurturing their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth.

Parents welcome additional information and ideas that can be shared with children. Successful parent education is built on collaboration and involvement (Lundgren & Morrison, 2003; Pena, 2000; Diffily & Morrison, 1997). There are many resourceful ways parents can be included in children's instructional programs, including:

- newsletters
- parent meetings
- observations
- participation in class projects, demonstrations, films, lectures
- assisting with field trips, health assessments, or making special arrangements
- preparing and presenting short programs on special topics

Parent involvement and collaboration encourage greater uniformity of health/safety information and practices between the child's home and school. This partnership also helps reduce frustration that occurs when children receive information that conflicts with family practices and values.

Other advantages of sharing instruction with parents include:

- better understanding of children's developmental needs
- improved parental esteem
- increased parental knowledge and competence
- reinforcement of children's learning
- strengthening good parenting skills
- improved communication between home and school

The resources and efforts of parents, children, and teachers can be united to bring about long-term improvements behaviors.

5. Strategies to manage an effective program operation;

Running an effective program requires a systematic approach. A systematic approach means that

the Candidate can determine the needs of her/his operation, families, and children; can make plans based on those needs; and can keep accurate records of needs, plans, and practices. Such a systematic approach should be applied to keeping records of attendance, fees, health status, and home visits. It should include specific plans for meeting the needs of children and their families and coordinating communication among involved adults through written information, meetings with parents and resource persons, and frequent informal discussions.

Many issues and problems are resolved most effectively in a meeting. Open communication in a staff meeting is one way to develop cooperation and harmony and to encourage a "we" feeling among staff members. Some topics for staff meetings include planning future in-service training topics and discussing the children's individual needs. The frequency and timing of staff meetings vary. Biweekly or weekly meetings may be more productive than long sessions held less frequently. Staff meetings may be held during the day or evening, depending on the schedules of the program and staff. Anyone who can profit from or contribute to the discussion should be encouraged to come to the meeting.

Both the director and the staff members must prepare for a staff meeting so that it will be productive for everyone. The director is responsible for the agenda and for distributing any material that should be read by the staff before the meeting. Each item on the posted agenda should include the name of the person responsible for presenting the item and leading the discussion, as well as a rough time estimate for adequate coverage of the item. If the director prepares the agenda carefully, and both the director and the staff members come well informed, the outcome of a staff meeting can be satisfying for everyone.

At the outset, it is important that the meeting begin and end at the stated time. Perhaps all the emphasis on times seems unimportant, but time management is critical. Clearly, conducting an effective staff meeting takes careful planning and requires special skills on the part of the director.

6. Maintaining a commitment to professionalism;

Professionals working with young children and their families make decisions based on knowledge of early childhood education and family life and demonstrate a commitment towards quality care for young children. The professional caregiver continues to set new goals and take advantage of training or educational experiences that will help her/him to grow more competent. Recognizing that the way they relate to one another directly affects the quality of child care and sets an example for children, adults in a child-care setting work to resolve issues and problems among themselves cooperatively and respectfully. They also work together to educate the community at large about the needs of young children. The child care provider should develop relationships with other child care professionals and establish a network for information and support.

7. Observing and recording children's behavior;

The ability to effectively observe children and assess their needs is the mark of a professional. Early detection of learning delays and/or physical disabilities can make a big difference in a child's future outcomes. Early detection hopefully leads to early intervention and ultimately better outcomes.

7. Observing and recording children's behavior;

A competent CDA candidate:

Works with parents to identify the strengths and needs of each child.

Develops skills in observing and recording information about children and their families in a nonjudgmental manner for use in planning and carrying out daily programs.

Maintains up-to-date records concerning the growth, health, behavior, and progress of each child and the group and shares the information with parents and appropriate center personnel.

Considers goals and objectives for each child and for the group as a whole.

Develops realistic plans responsive to the needs of all, including children with disabilities.

Implements plans for each child by identifying developmentally and culturally appropriate activities and materials for each day.

8. Principles of child growth and development;

Fostering growth and development during children's early years is vital to their proper growth and success beyond their primary years. Childcare practitioners must be cognizant of how children grow in all domains, and their roles in promoting proper growth. Good nutrition, age appropriate environments and experiences, exposure to reading materials, and open-ended questions are just a few ways in which a learned early childhood teacher would promote the holistic growth of children.

The importance of 'playing to learn' is a key concept in child growth and development. Play is in and of itself a valuable cognitive development tool. The context for play includes the microsystem, macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and chronosystem. For the young child, learning and play are synonymous. A true childcare professional is familiar with the concept of children's ability to learn and grow through play.