



DAP Frequently Asked Questions

What is “developmentally appropriate practice”?

As NAEYC defines it, developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is a framework of principles and guidelines for best practice in the care and education of young children, birth through age 8. It is grounded both in the research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about educational effectiveness. The principles and guidelines outline practice that promotes young children’s optimal learning and development.

The core of developmentally appropriate practice is intentionality in making the many long-term and short-term decisions that add up to “practice that promotes young children’s optimal learning and development.” To make good decisions, teachers must take into consideration what they know (1) about child development and learning; (2) about each child as an individual; and (3) about the social and cultural contexts each child lives in.

The guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice address decision making in five key practice areas: (1) Creating a caring community of learners; (2) Teaching to enhance development and learning; (3) Planning curriculum to achieve important goals; (4) Assessing children’s development and learning; and (5) Establishing reciprocal relationships with families.

Commitment to developmentally appropriate practice is the foundation for all of NAEYC’s work—its publications and conferences, professional development/training offerings, and policy/advocacy work, as well as its accreditation of college-level preparation programs through NCATE and accreditation of programs serving children.



Where did NAEYC’s idea of developmentally appropriate practice come from?

That a given activity might be developmentally suitable (or not) for children of a particular age was hardly a novel idea when NAEYC first addressed it. Psychologists and educators had long used the concept.

The need for a more specific description became obvious in the mid-1980s, however, when NAEYC created a system to accredit programs that provided care and education to young children. Because the new accreditation guidelines required programs to provide “developmentally appropriate activities...materials...or expectations” for children, NAEYC needed to give programs some specifics of what that phrase meant. In 1986 NAEYC issued a formal position statement defining “developmentally appropriate practice.” The statement has been revised and reissued periodically, most recently in 2009. [Read a DAP Position Statement Chronology]

Although some in the early childhood field disagree with aspects of developmentally appropriate practice as NAEYC defines it, most early childhood professionals express general agreement with its basic principles and guidelines.

Where can I get a copy of the DAP Position Statement?

NAEYC’s 2009 Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (PDF) is available free for download. A 36-page print booklet containing the statement also can be ordered from the Online Store (Item #3759).

Does NAEYC offer any books on developmentally appropriate practice?

Yes, NAEYC offers several books, as well as DVDs and brochures, on developmentally appropriate practice explicitly. Visit the DAP Resources page or browse the Online Store. The rest of our publications, like all of NAEYC’s work, are based in DAP’s principles and guidelines.