

# A Guide for Families

## Using NAEYC Standards to Find Quality Programs for Young Children

**T**he National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed ten standards for early childhood programs, which can help parents and families make the right choice when they are looking for a child care center, preschool, or kindergarten. This introduction to the standards can guide your family in finding a program that will help your children learn and grow.

The new standards and criteria are based on the latest research on the development and education of young children, and were created with input from thousands of experts and educators from around the country. The standards define what NAEYC—the world’s largest organization of early childhood professionals—believes all early childhood programs should be.

The standards—and more than 400 related criteria—are also the foundation of the NAEYC Accreditation system for early childhood programs. To earn NAEYC Accreditation, programs must meet all ten standards, by successfully performing at least 80 percent of the criteria related to each standard.

### Standard 1—Relationships

**The program promotes positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child’s sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community, and to foster each child’s ability to contribute as a responsible community member.**

Warm, sensitive and responsive relationships help children feel secure. The safe and secure environments built by positive relationships help children thrive physically, benefit from learning experiences, and cooperate and get along with others.

#### What you want to see in a program:

- Children and adults feel welcome when they visit the program. Teachers help new children adjust to the program environment and make friends with other children.
- Teaching staff engage in warm, friendly conversations with the children, and encourage and recognize children’s work and accomplishments.
- Children are encouraged to play and work together.



- Teachers help children resolve conflicts, by identifying feelings, describing problems, and trying alternative solutions. Teaching staff never physically punish children.

### Standard 2—Curriculum

**The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.**

A well-planned written curriculum provides a guide for teachers and administrators. It helps them work together and balance different activities and approaches to maximize children’s learning and development. The curriculum includes goals for the content that children are learning, planned activities linked to these goals, daily schedules and routines, and materials that will be used. NAEYC and the NAEYC Accreditation system do not prescribe a specific curriculum—programs can design their own or choose a commercially available curriculum that meets NAEYC’s curriculum guidelines.

#### What you want to see in a program:

- Ask about the program’s curriculum, and how it addresses all aspects of child development. The curriculum should not focus on just one area of development.
- Children are given opportunities to learn and develop through exploration and play, as well as teachers working with individual children and small groups on specific skills.
- Materials and equipment are provided that will spark children’s interest, and encourage them to experiment and learn.
- Activities are designed to help children get better at reasoning, problem-solving, getting along with others, using language, and other skills.
- Infants and toddlers play with toys and art materials that “do something” based on children’s actions, such as jack-in-the-box, cups that fit inside one another, and playdough.

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## Standard 3—Teaching

**The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child’s learning and development in the context of the program’s curriculum goals.**

Children have different learning styles, needs, capacities, interests and backgrounds. By recognizing these differences, and using instructional approaches that are appropriate for each child, teachers and staff help all children learn.

### What you want to see in a program:

- Teachers carefully supervise all children.
- Teachers provide time daily for indoor and outdoor activities (weather permitting) and organize time and space so that children have opportunities to work or play individually and in groups.
- Children’s recent work (e.g., art, emergent writing) is arranged in classroom displays to help children reflect on and extend their learning.
- Teachers modify strategies and materials in response to the needs and interests of individual children, in order to engage each child and enhance learning.

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## Standard 4—Assessment of Child Progress

**The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children’s learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.**

Assessments help teachers plan appropriately challenging curriculum, and tailor instruction that responds to each child’s strengths and needs. Assessments are also important steps in identifying children with disabilities, and ensuring that they receive needed services.

### What you want to see in a program:

- The program supports children’s learning using a variety of assessment methods, such as observations, checklists, and rating scales.
- Assessment methods are appropriate for each child’s age and level of development, and obtain information on all areas of development, including math, science, and other cognitive skills, language, social-emotional development, and physical development.
- Teachers use assessment methods and information to design goals for individual children and monitor their

progress, as well as to improve the program and its teaching strategies.

- Families receive information about their child’s development and learning on a regular basis, including through meetings or conferences.

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## Standard 5—Health

**The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury.**

Children must be healthy and safe in order to learn and grow. Programs must be healthy and safe to support the healthy development of children.

### What you want to see in a program:

- Teaching staff have training in pediatric first aid.
- Infants are placed on their backs to sleep.
- The program has policies regarding regular hand washing, and routinely cleans and sanitizes all surfaces in the facility.
- The program has a clear plan for responding when a child is ill, including how to decide whether a child needs to go home, and how families will be notified.
- Snacks and meals are nutritious, and food is prepared and stored safely.

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## Standard 6—Teachers

**The program employs and supports a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children’s learning and development and to support families’ diverse needs and interests.**

Teachers who have specific preparation, knowledge, and skills in child development and early childhood education are more likely to provide positive interactions, richer language experiences, and quality learning environments.

### What you want to see in a program:

- Teaching staff with educational qualifications, and specialized knowledge about young children and early childhood development. For example, ask how many teachers have Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials, associate’s degrees or higher.
- The program makes provisions for ongoing staff development, including orientations for new staff, and opportunities for continuing education.
- Teaching staff have training in the program’s curriculum, and are prepared to participate as a member of the teaching team.

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## Standard 7—Families

The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child’s family to foster children’s development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.

To support children’s optimal learning and development, programs need to establish relationships with families based on mutual trust and respect; involve families in their children’s educational growth; and encourage families to fully participate in the program.

### What you want to see in a program:

- All families are welcome, and encouraged to be involved in all aspects of the program. Families may visit any area of the facility at any time during regular hours of operation.
- Teachers and staff talk with families about their family structure and their views on child rearing and use that information to adapt the curriculum and teaching methods to the families they serve.
- The program uses a variety of strategies to communicate with families, including family conferences, new family orientations, and individual conversations.
- Program information—including policies and operating procedures—is provided in a language that families can understand.

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## Standard 8—Community Relationships

The program establishes relationships with, and uses the resources of, the children’s communities to support the achievement of program goals.

Relationships with agencies and institutions in the community can help a program achieve its goals, and connect families with resources that will support children’s healthy development and learning.

### What you want to see in a program:

- The program connects with and uses museums, parks, libraries, zoos, and other resources in the community.
- Representatives from community programs, such as musical performers and local artists, are invited to share their interests and talents with the children.
- The staff develop professional relationships with agencies and organizations in the community that further the program’s capacity to meet the needs and interests of children and families.

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## Standard 9—Physical Environment

The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development.

An organized, properly equipped and well-maintained program environment facilitates the learning, comfort, health, and safety of the children and adults who use the program.

### What you want to see in a program:

- The facility is designed so that staff can supervise all children by sight and sound.
- The program has necessary furnishings, such as hand-washing sinks, child-sized chairs and tables, and cots, cribs, beds, or sleeping pads.
- A variety of materials and equipment that are appropriate for children’s ages and stages of development are available, and are kept clean, safe, and in good repair.
- Outdoor play areas have fences or natural barriers that prevent access to streets and other hazards.
- First aid kits, fire extinguishers, fire alarms, and other safety equipment are installed and available.

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## Standard 10—Leadership and Management

The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences.

Effective management and operations, knowledgeable leaders, and sensible policies and procedures are essential to building a quality program, and maintaining the quality over time.

### What you want to see in a program:

- The program administrator or director has the necessary educational qualifications, including a degree from a 4-year college or university and specialized college course work in early childhood education, child development or related fields.
- The program is licensed and/or regulated by the applicable state agency.
- The program has written policies and procedures, which are shared with families, and which address issues such as the program’s philosophy and curriculum goals; policies on guidance and discipline; health and safety procedures; and emergency plans.
- The program maintains appropriate group sizes and ratios of teaching staff to children. For example: **Infants**—no more than 8 children in a group, with 2 teaching staff; **Toddlers**—no more than 12 children in a group, with 2 teaching staff; **4-year-olds**—no more than 20 children in a group, with 2 teaching staff



This guide is an introduction to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria. For more information about the new standards, the benefits of quality programs for young children, and finding quality programs in your community, visit the following Web sites:

[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)    [www.rightchoiceforkids.org](http://www.rightchoiceforkids.org)

## Help build more quality programs for young children

If you are using this guide to find a child care program, preschool or kindergarten for your child, you may have already seen that finding quality can be a challenge. While the number of quality programs is growing (and there are now more than 10,000 NAEYC-accredited programs around the country) there are not enough quality programs for all the children and families who need them. Now that you have learned more about what to look for in a program, we hope you will raise your voice to support efforts to ensure that all young children can benefit from quality early education programs.

- Write or call your elected officials—local, state, and federal—and urge them to invest in quality programs for young children.
- Ask businesses in your community to sponsor early childhood programs that are working to improve.
- Volunteer with an early childhood program, and support their efforts to provide additional training and education for teachers and staff.
- Encourage other families to use this guide to find quality programs, and to join efforts to improve programs for young children.

For more information on ways you can help foster more quality programs for young children, visit [www.naeyc.org/policy/](http://www.naeyc.org/policy/).

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