Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): A Guide for Parents

DAP is the approach early care and education professionals use to teach your young child.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice:
• Is grounded in research on how young children learn.
• Provides connection to real-world experiences and opportunities to gain knowledge and skills through hands-on learning.
• Prepares children for future learning.
• Acknowledges the role of play in learning and development.

FACT: Meaningful play experiences help your child build background knowledge, imagination, and rational thought that enables academic skill development.

Consider:
• Playing with your child in a water table helps them understand math concepts like shapes and measurements, as well as science concepts like float, sink, and waves.
• Asking your child questions about observed activities, encouraging experimentation, and helping them understand cause and effect relationships during play.
• Including playful elements like using reusable materials to create their own inventions.

FACT: Play is the primary way your child uses language and math concepts.

Consider:
• Allowing your child to construct stories during imaginative play will later become the foundation for creative writing.
• Helping your child recreate elements of familiar books during play, demonstrating the understanding of characters, emotions, and empathy.
• Supporting your child to make choices that interest them as a way to guide their math and literacy skills.
• Asking what strategies your child’s teacher uses for reading instruction.
• Asking if worksheet and book activities are made playful.
**FACT:** Dramatic play helps your child develop executive functioning and the ability to self-regulate.

**Consider:**
- During dramatic play, take turns with your child contributing ideas into imagined scenarios.
- Asking if your child’s school promotes social and emotional learning.
- Providing your child with opportunities to make choices in their learning.

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**FACT:** Physical movement—including the freedom to play—helps your child improve his/her behavior and attention.

**Consider:**
- Giving your child regular opportunities to move their bodies and engage in unstructured physical activities.
- Asking if your school has a recess policy.
- Asking your child’s teacher if physical activity is part of the classroom routine.

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**Is Your Child’s Environment Developmentally-Appropriate?** In DAP environments, your child will:

- Create rather than duplicate.
- Make choices rather than just being told what to do.
- Appreciate the process rather than the end product.

- Move rather than wait.
- Make their own lines instead of coloring within pre-made lines.
- Ask questions and figure out the answers themself.

- Attempt to solve their own problems rather than wait for an adult to solve them.
- Write their own books rather than fill in workbooks.
- Learn interesting information and use meaningful skills.

- Speak rather than listen passively.
- Create art rather than do pre-planned crafts.
- Follow a schedule based on their needs.

- Explore their interests rather than just learning what an adult thinks they should learn.
- Learn through experience rather than mechanical repetition.

*(Adapted from “The Butterfly Garden” by Sandra Crosse)*