

Mixed-Age Play

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

III. Daily Program for Children

A. Children learn through self-paced play, and through active engagement with materials, the provider, and other children.

2. Infant and toddler activities focus on individualized activities and spontaneous interactions in group play

IV. Supporting Children's Development

C. The provider actively promotes social skills and positive relationships among children.

5. Infants have opportunities to be in safe contact with each other and with older children in the group.



El Mundo De Niños



Tricia's Harmony House



HoneyPie Nature Playschool

The Basics

Why is mixed age play beneficial? Mixed-age play, or play among children of different age groups, has invaluable benefits for children's development. A learning community of mixed ages fosters an appreciation for individual differences and reduces competitiveness among children. In this type of play:

Older children...

gain self-confidence in social interactions

build leadership skills

practice empathy and nurturing others

exercise creativity and flexibility

Younger children...

engage in more complex play

develop better expressive language

learn problem-solving strategies

absorb numeracy and literacy concepts

[How do I facilitate mixed-age play?](#) Mixed-age groups are common in family child care. Adults play a key role in mixed-age play by providing the appropriate space, time, and materials. Research shows that when given the choice, children will naturally choose to play in mixed-age groups. By providing open-ended materials, such as blocks, loose parts, playdough, and balls, children of many ages can engage in imaginative, collaborative play together. Older children support younger children in play by dividing roles, explaining rules, and creating fantasy storylines. For this reason, children need long periods of uninterrupted time to plan, develop, and execute play ideas.

[What about children’s different abilities?](#) Adults help notice and appreciate individual differences that are inevitable, and often drastic, among mixed-age children. A simple, “They’re still learning, let’s show them how we...” when a difference in ability arises can help older children gain confidence and younger children feel supported. Even if collaborative play between children of mixed ages is minimal, younger children are constantly watching and learning from older children. These experiences will help children develop essential skills for working well with others, especially in collaborative group work, throughout their lives.

I want to learn more!

- [The Special Value of Age-Mixed Play](#)
- [The Benefits of Mixed-Age Grouping](#)
- [Early Childhood Mixed Age Grouping](#)
- [Strategies for Working with Mixed-Age Groups in Early Childhood Education](#)
- [What Exactly Is Play, and Why Is It Such a Powerful Vehicle for Learning?](#)



Let the Dragon’s Fly



Growing Hands Family Child Care



Kathy’s Kids Home Child Care

This resource is available to you through Satellite Family Child Care System, a YoungStar Connect Partner.