

Reading Assignment

Planning the Day in Infant-Toddler Programs



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By Jackie Post and Mary Hohmann

Early childhood educators familiar with the HighScope preschool approach know that a consistent daily routine is one of the important elements of programs for children of preschool age (2½ to 5 years old). As more and more HighScope programs serve children in the infant-toddler age range (from birth to 2½ or 3 years old), staff members must decide how to plan the day to meet the needs of those very young children.

Guidelines for Daily Schedules

In this article, we present some guidelines for developing daily schedules and routines for infants and toddlers in HighScope child care settings. The following scenario, which was observed in a HighScope infant-toddler program, illustrates some

of the principles of maintaining daily schedules for infants and toddlers:

Six toddlers sit at a small table eating lunch. Their caregivers, Ann and Ruby, sit with them at the table. As the children finish, they put their cups and plates into a dish tub, leave the table, and return to the riding toys they were playing with before lunchtime. Ann stays at the table with the children who are still eating, while Ruby sits on the floor near the children who are using riding toys. When all the children have finished, Ann removes the dish tub and wipes the table. Ruby then takes the children individually or by twos into the bathroom for the caregiving routines that precede naptime, returning them to play with the riding toys until naptime. Ann takes Ruby's place on the floor with the riding-toy riders until each child has been to the bathroom and it's time for stories and naps.

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This after-lunch scenario illustrates typical daily occurrences in HighScope infant and toddler programs. These toddlers are engaged in a **pattern, or sequence of activities** — lunch, riding toys, bodily care routines, riding toys, stories, and naps. They move from one part of their day to the next with a **child-focused transition** between each part — using the riding toys serves as a transition from lunch to toileting to stories and naps. The children also experience certain **predictable elements within each activity**. For example, every day as they finish lunch, the toddlers put their dishes into the dish tub.

Before discussing the planning behind the sequences of activities in HighScope care settings, we need to define what a *daily schedule* means for an infant or a toddler. In a group of six to nine infants and

toddlers, **each child has a consistent daily schedule, or pattern of activities, based on their particular needs, temperament, and natural rhythms**. This means that six to nine individualized daily schedules occur simultaneously, calling for both flexibility and organization on the part of caregiving staff.

Fortunately, there are common elements among infants' and toddlers' individual daily schedules, and these elements often overlap. This overlap makes it possible for caregivers to **create an overall daily schedule that is stable and responsive to children's individual needs**.

For infants and toddlers, **the components of the day in a HighScope program include certain regular events**: *play or choice time, outside time,*

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and additionally for older toddlers, *small-group time* and *large-group time*. Interspersed among these daily events are individual *caregiving routines*, that is, the supportive, child-focused interactions that occur during eating, napping, and bodily care (including diapering, toileting, washing, and dressing).

The following is the overall program schedule that evolved from children's individual schedules in a HighScope mixed-age child care program serving infants, toddlers, and younger pre-schoolers (ages 3 months to 2½ years).

Overall Daily Schedule

Arrivals (7:00 – 8:00 a.m.)	Bodily care
Choice time	Nap
Breakfast	Bodily care
Bodily care	Small-group time
Choice time	Choice time
Cleanup	Outside time
Large-group time	Bodily care
Bodily care	Choice time
Outside time	Departures (5:00 – 6:00 p.m.)
Lunch (12:00 – 1:00 p.m.)	

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The next three slides show “Daily Schedules for Latisha, Bobby, and Carlos,” which present the actual daily routines followed by three children of different ages in that HighScope program. These individual schedules include routine elements that are fairly consistent from day to day (e.g., using a potty chair after lunch) as well as activities that may vary each day (e.g., choosing to play with water toys at one of the choice times). Note that caregivers have planned the overall program schedule to overlap as much as possible with children’s individual schedules. In most cases, we have not given specific starting times for the events on these schedules, because the times when various activities occur and the length of each time segment will vary according to the ongoing interests and activities of individual children.



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Daily Schedules for Latisha, Bobby, and Carlos

Daily Schedule for Latisha (A non-napper), Age 2½

Arrival (7:15 a.m.; says “Bye” to Dad as she sits in caregiver’s lap)

Choice time (plays in house area next to Carlos)

Breakfast

Choice time (plays in block area, then house area)

Bodily care (is in the process of toilet training: uses toilet and washes hands independently, using step stool at the sink)

Cleanup time (with an adult, puts blocks into baskets in the block area)

Large-group time (uses bells and drum with music tape)

Outside time (plays on slides and swings)

Lunch (noon – 1:00 p.m.)

Choice time (uses riding toys)

Outside time (digs in gravel with shovel)

Choice time (looks at books)

Bodily care (changes into a clean pair of socks)

Departure (5:15 p.m.)

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Daily Schedule for Bobby, Age 5 Months

Arrival (7:45 a.m.; mom passes him to the caregiver; caregiver holds him and he smiles at mom as he watches her go)

Choice time (lies on blanket with several soft balls)

Feeding (caregiver holds him and gives him a bottle)

Bodily care (usually gazes at pictures on the wall as caregiver changes his diaper)

Choice time (sits in infant seat, reaches for and grasps toys on tray)

Outside time (lies on a blanket near the slide, where he can see children and caregivers)

Nap

Bodily care (diaper change)

Feeding (12:10–1:00 p.m.; has bottle in caregiver's lap)

Choice time (splashes hands in tub of water with float toys)

Bodily care (diaper change)

Nap

Bodily care (plays peek-a-boo with caregiver as she changes diaper)

Feeding (plays peek-a-boo with caregiver, looks at books with another infant as caregiver reads)

Departure (5:30 p.m.)

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Daily Schedule for Carlos, Age 18 Months

Arrival (7:50 a.m.; waves to mom from the window as she goes to her car)

Choice time (plays in house area next to Latisha)

Breakfast

Bodily care (chooses music at the changing table; has diaper change)

Choice time (first plays in block area with Latisha, then asks caregiver to read him stories)

Large-group time (shakes bells, then returns to book he was looking at)

Bodily care (diaper change)

Outside time (uses shovels and rakes at the sand table)

Lunch (noon –1:00 p.m.; eats spaghetti with a spoon and fingers)

Bodily care (diaper change)

Nap

Small-group time (fills and empties containers with water in washtub)

Choice time (uses riding and pushing toys)

Bodily care (brings a diaper from his cubby when caregiver asks him to get one)

Outside time

Choice time (explores books, asks caregiver to read stories to him)

Bodily care (diaper change to music)

Departure (5:40 p.m.)

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Caregivers in HighScope care settings, then, must **learn and respond to each infant's or toddler's personalized daily schedule and at the same time develop an overall daily schedule that accommodates all the children in the group.**

Coordinating multiple schedules can be a challenge. This is one reason why infant and toddler groups are relatively small (three to nine children) and why the ratio of adults to children in these groups is one adult for every two to four children. The complexity of dealing with infant and toddler schedules also makes it critically important for teaching teams to spend time each day discussing their observations of children and planning around them.

Though it *is* challenging to organize a program around multiple routines, the benefits to children are great. When routines for infants and toddlers are predictable and well-coordinated, infants and

toddlers gain a sense of safety, security, and control. Since variability can overwhelm them, these very young children rely on adults to **maintain a sequence of events that remains substantially the same from one day to the next.** This daily consistency allows very young children to anticipate what happens next (e.g., riding toys then eating lunch). Even such an event as the daily separation from their parents is easier when children know what they will be doing after their parents leave.

Parts of a Daily Schedule

We've now discussed some **general principles** that guide our approach to daily schedules for infants and toddlers in child care settings. Next, we'll briefly describe the **typical components** of these schedules.

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Choice Time

Young as they are, infants and toddlers, as they choose and explore materials at choice time, are able to take initiative and use problem-solving skills. Of course, in an active learning setting, adults offer children choices and materials during all parts of the day. During choice time, however, children and adults alike are focused on play in which the infants and toddlers use all their senses to experiment with a variety of sensory-motor materials.

Adults provide nonmobile infants at choice time by bringing them materials to explore (e.g., materials with a variety of textures, such as large sea shells, wooden spoons, or shiny apples). For infants who can sit by themselves, adults might provide baskets containing such commonplace treasures as pine cones, a toothbrush, metal keys on a ring, and a tennis ball. For toddlers, choice time offers possibilities for more complex play in a specific play or

interest area — an appropriately stocked toddler block area, house area, art area, toy area, or sand-and-water area. In these interest areas, toddlers can choose things to explore and play with according to their interests and intentions at any given moment. Some older toddlers are able to express their intentions in a very brief plan, for example, by pointing to the toy area and saying “balls.”

Outside Time

Except for the fact that it occurs outdoors, outside time for infants and toddlers is very similar to choice time. During outside time, children explore and experience the world of nature and try out equipment that develops their gross-motor skills. Outside time takes place in a safe, enclosed outdoor area stocked with age-appropriate toys and equipment. Weather permitting, children enjoy riding, climbing, sliding, swinging, rocking, pushing, pulling, pouring, splashing, filling, emptying, and

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building. Nonmobile infants spend time on the grass, on a blanket, in a stroller or backpack, or in their caregivers' arms. They may explore loose materials caregivers have provided — such as scarves, balls, or large stones — or they may just observe their surroundings.

Small-Group Time

Caregivers plan small-group experiences for older toddlers that are based on their observations of children's actions and interests. Often the small-group activity involves toddlers in some simple process, such as crumbling toast to feed the birds or taking a walk. Or the activity may offer children an opportunity to explore new materials, such as newspaper or crayons, or to work with a familiar material they particularly enjoy, such as a favorite storybook, play dough, or water.

Large-Group Time

Large-group time offers toddlers a change to participate in music and movement explorations with other children. Large-group time is brief (often less than five minutes) and physically active. As with every other part of the day, at large-group time children make choices about what to do; for infants and toddlers, these choices might include just observing the activity, moving in and out of it, or not participating at all.

Transitions

Infant and toddler caregivers strive to keep transitions — events that link to one part of the day to the next — to a minimum. When transitions do occur, adults plan them as carefully as possible to avoid disrupting children's play or activities. The transitions are consistent, so children know what to expect. When it is necessary to move children from

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one activity to another (e.g., for a diaper change), caregivers attempt to help children retain a sense of control by planning a transition that is both simple and active (e.g., riding toys between lunch and diapering), making room for children's choices (e.g., "What toy would you like to bring to the changing table?"), reminding children what will happen next (e.g., "Stories and nap are next"), and avoiding having children wait (e.g., children play with riding toys instead of standing in line at the changing table).

Caregiving Routines

In addition to having such regular events as choice time and outside time, infants and toddlers spend much of their time in caregiving routines: eating, napping, and bodily care.

We've summarized here the basic elements that make up daily schedules for infants and toddlers. Caregiving staff must put these elements together in ways that reflect the needs of their particular group of children.



Typical Infant-Toddler Behavior During the Daily Routine

Here are some examples of typical behaviors of infants and toddlers during important elements of the daily schedule.

Choice Time

Michael rolls himself toward the mirror reflection. Elizabeth crawls to a doll, gets into a sitting position, picks up the doll with both hands, and babbles. She puts the doll on the floor, picks it up again, and babbles. Tara walks around the room hitting all the blocks on the floor with a plastic saw. An adult watching Tara offers her a plastic hammer to use along with the wrench.

Outside Time

Ian and Jorge make roaring noises on their riding toys while traveling on the riding-toy path. Lawanda pours buckets of water from the wading pool onto the grass. In the arms of his caregiver, Andy gurgles



and waves to Miko, who is swinging on the swing. Pari sits in the grass and runs her hands over the dandelions that grow all around her. An adult sitting next to Pari imitates her actions with the dandelions. Pari watches the adult and laughs.

Typical Infant-Toddler Behavior During the Daily Routine (continued)

Small-Group Time

Three older toddlers and their caregiver, Joanne, are gathered around a plastic baby bathtub into which they are crumbling pieces of stale bread and toast to feed to the birds. “See!” Laila says, letting a handful of crumbs fall into the tub and then wiggling her fingers. Henry pats all the crumbs in the tub while Benji claps two pieces of toast together. Joanne observes each child’s way of exploring the materials, and she supports individual children by imitating their actions and responding to their conversational leads. Elsewhere in the yard, other toddlers are absorbed in other activities.

Large-Group Time

Six toddlers and their caregivers, Patrick and Marie, are moving to music. Eden and Juan bounce up and down, while Carter and Yusef sit on either side of

Marie, swaying side to side with her as the music plays. Matthew and Becki hold hands, laugh, and fall down. Patrick falls down with them. They repeat this sequence until the music stops. Annie, who has been watching the group from the house area, toddles over and joins the action, holding up her arms to Patrick to let her know she wants to be rocked to the music. Patrick picks her up and continues her dance with the other children.

Transitions

Max’s day at the infant-toddler center begins when his dad bugs him and then gives him to Rochelle, who rocks him gently in her arms as she sings him the “Good Morning” song. Then Rochelle carries him over to the toy area and waits until he is engrossed in playing with his favorite toys, the small dinosaurs, before turning to another child.

Typical Infant-Toddler Behavior During the Daily Routine (continued)

Large-Group Time — Is “Keeping It Together” a Goal?

I work with a very active group of toddlers. There are several activity books I like to use that have ideas for group games and circle time activities. However, when I try these with my children, I often can't get them to stay together until we get through a game. Any ideas?

— A child care teacher

Activity books can be a good place to start when planning experiences for toddlers, but many books suggest ideas that are more suited to older children and thus would have to be simplified for your children. Remember that your own observations of your group of children will best enable you to plan activities that fit their interests and needs for active involvement.

You mention that the children in your care are “active” — a description that characterizes most toddlers! We find that children this young are often not interested

in remaining with a group activity that lasts more than a few minutes. However, you may have some children in your group who happen to love what they are doing at the moment and will gladly continue the activity for some time.

To meet these individual needs, you can structure your activities so children may come and go as their interests dictate. You'll need to provide other choices for those not currently interested in what the group is doing. For example, teachers may plan a group activity around listening to music and exploring some instruments. During the activity, if two children wander away from the group, one of the teachers could offer them some wooden beads and shoelaces to play with. Keep in mind that younger children often have no concept of “finishing” an activity or game but can nevertheless be deeply involved in the *process* that is occurring.

Typical Infant-Toddler Behavior During the Daily Routine (continued)

Post, J., Hohmann, M., & Epstein, A. S. (2011). *Tender care and early learning: Supporting infants and toddlers in child care settings*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.

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Snyder, C. M. (2016b). *Lesson plans for a strong start: The first 30 days for toddlers*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.