

The BEST for Babies

**Expert Advice
for Assessing
Infant-Toddler Programs**

from
Dr. Alice Sterling Honig



THE BEST FOR BABIES

Expert Advice for
Assessing Infant-Toddler
Programs

Alice Sterling Honig, PhD

Bulk Purchase

Gryphon House books are available for special premiums and sales promotions as well as for fund-raising use. Special editions or book excerpts also can be created to specifications. For details, contact the Director of Marketing at Gryphon House.

Disclaimer

Gryphon House, Inc., cannot be held responsible for damage, mishap, or injury incurred during the use of or because of activities in this book. Appropriate and reasonable caution and adult supervision of children involved in activities and corresponding to the age and capability of each child involved are recommended at all times. Do not leave children unattended at any time. Observe safety and caution at all times.

the BEST for Babies

for Assessing
Infant-Toddler Programs



Gryphon House, Inc.
Lewisville, NC

from **Dr. Alice Honig**

Copyright

©2014 Alice Sterling Honig

Published by Gryphon House, Inc.

P. O. Box 10, Lewisville, NC 27023

800.638.0928; 877.638.7576 (fax)

Visit us on the web at www.gryphonhouse.com.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or technical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior written permission of the publisher. Printed in the the United States. Every effort has been made to locate copyright and permission information.

Cover photograph courtesy of Shutterstock.com © 2014.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Honig, Alice S.

The best for babies : expert advice for assessing infant-toddler programs / Dr. Alice Sterling Honig.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-87659-554-1

1. Child care--United States. 2. Child development--United States. 3. Education, Preschool--United States. 4. Education, Preschool--Activity programs--United States. I. Title.

HQ778.63.H66 2014

362.70973--dc23

2014009466

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Preface | 7 |
| Chapter 1: The Importance of Quality Child Care | 11 |
| Chapter 2: Ingredients of Care Quality | 19 |
| Chapter 3: Personal Interactions: The Keys to Care Quality | 45 |
| Chapter 4: Using the Care Quality Checklist | 119 |
| Chapter 5: The Care Quality Checklist | 131 |
| Appendix: The Abbreviated Care Quality Checklist | 151 |
| References and Recommended Readings | 155 |
| Index | 165 |

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge with grateful appreciation all the loving care of perceptive and skilled caregivers and parents who have cherished little children over the years, whose interactions with the children have illuminated theoretical and research findings about developmentally appropriate practices in harmonious and vivid ways.

I thank with deep appreciation Editor-in-Chief Diane Ohanesian and the Gryphon House staff for their dedication and gracious support in making this book available for caregivers, parents, and directors.

I thank my children, Larry, Madeleine, and Jonathan, for the privilege of helping me learn through years of practice, through mistakes, and through positive interactions how to nourish each of them through the years and help them grow into the deeply committed and admirable parents they have been to my grown grandchildren.

PREFACE

Awareness of the importance of early education for children continues to grow not only among developed nations but also across the world. Quality early childhood education (ECE) is recognized increasingly as a pathway to help children grow out of lives of poverty, a route toward school success, and a helpful support for children on the journey toward later satisfaction in their professional and personal lives.

Tools for assessing quality programs mostly have been based on assessing outcomes for young children, such as knowledge of ABCs or overall readiness for kindergarten. Assessments may encompass a wide variety of programmatic aspects, including level of teacher education, cultural norms for child classroom behaviors, degree of child autonomy and choice of activity allowed, culturally accepted discipline techniques, and child-teacher ratios. Some assessments include ratings of the availability of printed program curricula; abundance of materials; toys and equipment; classroom ambience, such as lighting, wall coverings, and carpets; spatial arrangements; child gender ratios in the classroom; length of daily schedules; richness of teacher talk with children; and relationship of staff with families.

Many tools for assessing early childhood classrooms focus on structural variables; they predominantly emphasize child outcomes. And, indeed, research has shown the importance of some of the variables listed. For example, research on child-teacher ratios has revealed the vulnerability—as shown by their distressed behaviors—of male (but not female) children in group settings when there are more children per preschool teacher (Bornstein et al., 2006).

Other research has revealed that a teacher who holds a four-year college degree in early childhood education is more likely to be identified among teachers who are rated as “less authoritarian in their childrearing attitudes than caregivers with no training” (Arnett, 1989). Teacher training has been undertaken to enrich language with children and thus enhance quality of child experiences in care. Teachers with training in how to extend and lengthen conversational exchanges with young children were observed immediately after training (although not several months later) to extend their conversations with children (Honig and Martin, 2009). Significantly, teacher preparation, skills, and empathy have been shown to be the primary factors in children’s positive outcomes after their preschool experiences. When such teacher skills are lacking, then poorer outcomes for children have been found. Caribbean researchers concluded that “rural Guyanese children in classrooms with teachers who had high school qualifications did not seem prepared for primary school” (Roopnarine, 2013).

A study of nearly three thousand children in 703 state-funded preschool classrooms in nine U.S. states concluded that two factors in particular proved to be the best predictors of child outcomes: The quality of teacher-child interactions consistently proved to be the strongest predictor of children’s learning, followed by the learning environment (Sabol et al., 2013). From a content analysis of more than seventy-six studies, La Paro et al. (2012) also emphasized that the depth of quality must be factored in when assessing classroom quality.

Difficulties may arise in trying to characterize center quality by overall quality-rating scales across classrooms. Such ratings may miss the essential differences in interaction quality among teachers with the children they serve—even among those teachers serving the same age groups in a

facility. Capturing center-level quality based on average environmental rating scale scores could then fail to identify within-center quality differences in different classrooms. Identifying these in-classroom differences is necessary, for example, as directors and educational personnel in resource and referral agencies are planning programs to provide training for those teachers needing further enhancement of their knowledge and skills. Such identification could even be useful in identifying “master teachers” in a facility who could mentor new teachers or those needing wider practice in using positive styles and skills with young children or a deeper understanding of child development.

Given the critical importance of caregiver-child interactions in promoting cognitive, language, and social-emotional learning in young children, the care quality checklist items in this book focus strongly on the kind, quality, intensiveness, and extensiveness of the behaviors and interactions between a teacher or care provider and each child. The checklist provides a way to assess each interpersonal relationship—its quality in enhancing the learning and living experiences for young children. As a result, directors and teachers can consider the ratings as they identify ways to optimize the outcomes for each child.

Each of the checklist items has explanatory descriptive materials that can help each teacher focus even deeper on how to craft, creatively modify, and extend her interactions to meet the needs of each precious small person in her care. Examples and illustrative anecdotes clarify items to ensure that trainers and directors will find the checklist useful. The care quality checklist can be used to help teachers flourish and feel deepening pride in their professional expertise and careers as they continue to guide children’s learning and well-being.



THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY CHILD CARE

Loving, knowledgeable, and skilled caregivers provide the priceless ingredients for raising emotionally healthy children who will be enthusiastic learners and work hard to achieve their unique life goals. Given this kind of start in life, children are likely to grow into caring, concerned citizens who will, in turn, contribute to helping others grow up to become productive, creative, kind human beings. High-quality early care programs that emphasize regular staff training have been shown to yield impressive societal benefits:

- lower percentages of school-age children who needed to repeat classes;
- increased self-control;
- lower adolescent delinquency rates;
- less delinquency recidivism;
- more total years of education, including more college education; and
- more months per year as adult taxpaying workers.

CHAPTER

1



In times of financial hardship, child care centers may face budget cuts that decrease the possibility of funds for extensive staff training or staff monitoring. George Morrison (2012), professor of early education and author of “Racing to the Bottom,” has grimly noted, “some preschool programs, faced with increasing numbers of underemployed and out-of-work parents, cut their tuition, desperately trying to make their programs more affordable for the new generation of parents and families. These policies, of course, just accelerate the free fall into poor-quality programs.”

Research findings on the positive effects of quality care are beginning to percolate through other parts of society beyond child care and educational constituencies and some state governments. The greater the involvement of many different constituencies among citizens who become aware of the benefits of quality early care, the more likely that legal and financial as well as professional educational supports for quality care can become available through legislative focus and action.

Defining Quality Care

How is quality in early childhood education and child care defined? Many of the key elements for providing excellent nurturing care and learning opportunities for young children have been confirmed in research and clinical studies:

- Encouraging positive peer interactions in dramatic play
- Expressive daily book reading
- Galvanizing group projects
- Rich oral-language interactions
- Specific use of open-ended questions to promote thinking skills

- Strategies to improve numerical understandings
- Personal reflectivity
- Encouraging mindfulness and self-regulation
- Cognitive flexibility and sustained attention to tasks
- Fostering friendships
- Secure attachment
- Home-visitation techniques to enhance family involvement and to build secure infant-parent attachment

Additionally, teachers need further skills and specific techniques for nurturing and working with children who have special needs or who have experienced early abuse or trauma.

Numerous rating scales and assessment instruments are available for monitoring child achievement and progress in a wide range of developmental areas. Many of these scales, checklists, and rating instruments are particularly useful to monitor child attainments in child care settings. However, instruments for assessing the quality of provider care and for assessing the effectiveness of caregiver training efforts are in far shorter supply.

The need for quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) is becoming recognized at federal levels. Recently, the Center for American Progress released a report titled *Increasing the Effectiveness and Efficiency of Existing Public Investments in Early Childhood Education*, which includes recommendations for the federal government to enhance the quality of child care. The report urges partnering with states to build assessments and assessment systems that demonstrate that standards are being met. The report further recommends that the federal government should help determine the optimal set of skills and information



that caregivers need to know, to boost the efficacy of preparation programs for early childhood program staff. The report emphasizes the importance of implementing a consistent, state-of-the-art approach to high-quality professional development.

Finding ways to assess the quality of caregiving for young children has been a challenge. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start, individual states, and numerous child-development research centers have developed tools for evaluating the environments and quality of care in child care centers.

Turnover, not only of staff but also of directors, is a worrisome factor in its impact on quality. DeSouza (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with center directors to find out how they perceive or implement continuity of care. The NAEYC supports programmatic efforts to ensure quality of care by keeping infants and toddlers together with the same teachers during their first three years in child care. Interviews revealed

that most directors were vague as to the meaning of this marker of quality care for infants and toddlers. Most directors explained that operationalizing continuity of care would be too daunting a task. The directors pointed out their many responsibilities, which include fulfilling age-specific teacher-child ratios, meeting payroll budget, arranging for care when a teacher calls in sick, and meeting teacher needs. Moreover, De-Souza found that almost half of those hardworking directors, interviewed in depth, had quit their jobs within a year after the interviews and could no longer even be reached.

Staff and director turnover rates need to be taken into account in determining when to assess quality of care. When there is turmoil from turnover, it may be advisable to wait a few months until staff stability is in place before using any tool to assess quality of child care.

Teacher-Child Intimate Interactions

In a safe environment, highly skilled and well-trained caregivers are the most important ingredients of quality child care. Fancy furniture, stenciled wall-decoration patterns, and expensive toys do not define quality care. Tender, tuned-in, creative, and genuinely cherishing persons help children deepen their trust in adults. Trust is a four-way system: Adults have to trust their feelings of kindness, their bountiful reserves of patience, and their deep delight in each unique child in their care. Adults have to trust each child's signals of distress and try promptly to interpret those signals and meet that child's needs for nurturance. When children deeply trust that they are loved

and lovable—that they are totally accepted despite garbled speech, juice spills, toileting accidents, and loud wails when upset—then they trust themselves to try even when they encounter frustrations. These children are able to devote all their life energies to growing into capable, hardworking, and joyous persons. They can concentrate on learning language, new skills, how to navigate environments, how to work toys, and how to feel comfortable with reasonable social rules. These children can, in turn, learn to reach out with empathy and caring toward others because, from their earliest days, they have experienced empathy and kind, intimate interactions.

Without kind, intimate interactions, little persons may grow up carrying a core in their beings that remains anxious or belligerent for years. A teenage mother with two little ones once assured me that both of her children were “bad, really bad.” How sad for little ones to grow up feeling that conviction about themselves from the beginning of their lives! Without trust and intimacy, children feel tense from the earliest years—despite their defiant swaggers, blustering and aggressive behaviors, and indifference to adult entreaties or rules. Not having felt rock-solid in their innermost beings that they are precious, unique, important people, they may misinterpret others’ feelings. They may expect others to be mean and uncaring, because they never feel truly acknowledged and understood by an attentive, caring adult.

When a child is held, given leisurely time to play, offered safe and interesting materials to explore, and experiences intimate, one-on-one interactions with a special adult, she will grow and flourish. Secure that she is cherished and safe, the child can devote all her energies to learning. The child

will delight in and safely explore the world, gain receptive and expressive language skills, and forge those habits of attentiveness and persistence that make learning possible.





INGREDIENTS OF CARE QUALITY

The care quality checklist provided in this book defines quality specifically in terms of the relationships and interactions between the caregiver and each child in the provider's care in that facility. Thus, it is important initially to focus on what components of these personal interactions and relationships are essential for a caregiver to learn during professional preparation. In discussing caregiver interactions in this book, the terms *teacher*, *care provider*, and *caregiver* will be used interchangeably.

Understanding Developmental Milestones

Knowledge of developmental milestones is crucial. There are many online resources to

CHAPTER

2



help caregivers understand children's development. PBS offers a useful site called The ABCs of Child Development: Developmental Milestones for Your Child's First Five Years, available at <http://www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/index.html>. First Years offers a helpful chart detailing the milestones in hearing, speech, language, and cognition in a child's first eight years of life. It is available at <http://firstyears.org/miles/chart.pdf>.

Use intimate interactions with little ones to learn about the unique needs and stages of each child's development, where each child is, and what he requires. For example, some toddlers may have lots of single words but may not put two words together until they are nearly two years old. Once, while I was diapering one child, I heard another child scream. I called out, "No hitting, Luanne. That hurts." She answered back tartly and clearly: "I did not hit her; I bit her!" Her language skills were in awesome supply, although her ability to treat others gently needed more guidance.

Babies and young children often reach developmental milestones at different times. Some babies understand lots of talk but struggle to coordinate tongue, palate, teeth, vocal cords, and other articulators to pronounce words clearly. Some toddlers can carry a tune so well that a parent may be surprised to hear a toddler humming a song a teacher has taught the children. An older toddler may no longer scribble but may draw the semblance of a kitty or a tree. Tune in to the gifts of each child. Tune in to the timetables of each child. One child may learn to use the potty early but have trouble with an easy puzzle. Another toddler may expertly navigate the room after his teacher has wiped his nose and asked him to put the tissue in a wastebasket. Spatial skills, language skills, reasoning skills, and social skills—all develop at different times for different children.

The evidence is clear:
Children thrive and learn best when
they experience tender,
nurturing care.

There's a dizzying array of checklists and evaluation tools on the market that measure almost every detail of the early childhood environment. But, as a director or caregiver, how do you know if the most important piece—exploration and learning within a loving, supportive relationship—is a part of your program?



In **The Best for Babies**, Alice Sterling Honig shows you how to nurture the youngest children with:

- Nourishing interactions
- Social-emotional support
- Boosts for thinking and reasoning skill development
- Support for language development
- Appropriate matches between child and activity
- Opportunities for creative exploration and pretend play
- Positive behavior reinforcement
- Child-sensitive classroom pacing
- Safe choices and opportunities for autonomy
- A warm environment where children and families feel welcome



Alice Sterling Honig, PhD, professor emerita in the Syracuse University department of child and family studies, has devoted her career to discovering ways to best nurture and support the development of infants and toddlers. In *The Best for Babies*, she offers a wealth of suggestions, tips, and advice for providing the very best of care for our youngest children.



\$12.95

ISBN: 978-0-87659-554-1
A Gryphon House Book
www.gryphonhouse.com

ISBN: 978-0-87659-554-1



9 780876 595541