



**Best Practices in Early Education**  
(ACSI Supplemental Document)

At ACSI, we believe all children need access to high quality, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities. Aligned to school improvement goals, state early learning standards, and appropriate health and safety standards, this *Best Practices in Early Education* document encourages programs to understand industry best practices and research in early learning and create optimal learning environments for young children.

**While correlated to the Domains and Standards of ACSI *Inspire* accreditation, attainment of best practice elements is not required, but shared as a benchmark for achieving high quality care.**

Domain 1: PURPOSE	
Standard 1: Mission, Beliefs, and Foundation	The school operates from a written mission and statement of faith that outlines its biblical foundations and beliefs. The school identifies and assesses its expected student outcomes and uses results to drive decisions throughout operations and programs.

#### **Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education**

Quality Christian early education programs hold a biblical worldview based upon deeply held core values centered on God's Word and use those values to develop a philosophy of teaching young children.

Foundational documents identify the underlying principles on which the Christian early education program is established. High quality, high-functioning programs have clearly defined expected student outcomes for each age they serve. The mission and expected student outcomes serve as a lens through which the program sees its stakeholders (students, families, and community).

Domain 1: PURPOSE	
Standard 2: Spiritual Formation and Biblical Worldview Development	The school facilitates spiritual formation of students, provides opportunities for discipleship and outreach, and fosters the development of a biblical worldview. Spiritual growth toward maturity in Christ is a priority throughout school programs, is regularly assessed, and is modeled by faculty and staff.

#### **Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education**

High performing Christian early education programs place a high value on developing the spiritual lives of the children and families they serve. Spiritual formation in early education involves modeling Christlike character and encouraging children and their families to come to saving faith in Christ. This is done by investing in each child's personal spiritual development beyond curricular instruction, getting to know children and their families, and intentionally and proactively exposing them to the Gospel.

Domain 1: PURPOSE	
Standard 3: Governance and School Leadership	The school has a Christ-centered governing body that functions within clearly defined roles and responsibilities, establishes governance policies, participates in strategic planning, and advances organizational effectiveness. The head-of-school works collaboratively with school leadership to implement policies and procedures, support effective instructional practices, and drive school improvement.

### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

A high-quality early education program has a governing body that has a unique understanding of the needs, value of, and legal aspects of an early education program. Mission-focused governing bodies are aware of the needs of the early education community and strategically plan with these in mind. The value of the early education program is seen in the governing body's commitment to meet the financial needs of the staff and program to ensure its effectiveness. They are aware of and advocate for national, state, and local policies that protect the rights of faith-based early education. They are cognizant of the early education program's role as a first exposure to Christian education, and the unique opportunity it provides to the school ministry.

Domain 2: RELATIONSHIPS	
Standard 4: Caring Environment and Positive School Culture	The school develops a Christlike culture in which staff and students demonstrate respect, sensitivity, and responsiveness to individual needs and differences.

### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

High quality Christian early education programs continuously build relationships with children and their families while demonstrating respect for their home language, culture, needs and differences. A Christlike atmosphere is established by including families into the life of the program with opportunities for volunteering and participating. Family schedules and availability are considered as part of the planning for all aspects of the program. Caring and supportive relationships contribute to a sense of community which fosters a positive school culture. Early education programs support students by advocating on behalf of young children and their families.

Early education programs following best practices know that children learn best when they feel safe in emotionally healthy environments. The program implements pro-social interactions, affection, and mutual respect, helping children develop emotional and social skills. Programs integrate cultures and diverse backgrounds, modeling how to embrace the unique God-given differences in one another to live and thrive in the world.

Domain 2: RELATIONSHIPS	
Standard 5: Stakeholder Engagement	The school engages stakeholders in ways that develop community, promote accountability, and improve effectiveness.

### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Best practices in Christian early education begin with relationship building with the families they serve. Through open communication, families are engaged, and community is fostered. Families are onboarded through personal orientation to the school's expectations and goals. The program is open to listening to the families desired outcomes for their child. Written policies and procedures describe the program expectations through comprehensive parent/family handbooks that promote mutual accountability. Communication strategies are well-defined and include in-person reporting such as family conferences or home visits to promote dialogue about the child's growth and development. Strategies also include information sharing through daily touchpoints, allowing for two-way communication through a variety of avenues. Collaboration between school and home is cultivated to share about the child's educational experiences, needs, milestones, as well as progress and/or concerns that impact the child's well-being and development.

A high value is placed on gathering feedback from all program participants. The program regularly seeks input from staff and parents to adjust its instructional and operational practices. Survey data is annually gathered and analyzed for feedback regarding program satisfaction, giving parents a voice in their child's education.

Domain 2: RELATIONSHIPS	
Standard 6: Community Engagement	The school provides opportunities to engage with local, national, and global communities in ways that make a positive impact on students and build relationships outside of school.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

High-quality early education programs have established a positive reputation, providing deeper, stronger relationships as they serve as a light in their community. The school maintains active involvement in their local community to increase mutual understanding and visibility. The program provides educational opportunities on subject matter that are relevant to healthy developing young families and are open to the school and community-at-large. Topics could include parenting, finances, discipline, stepfamilies, trauma impact, personal spiritual development or raising children to love Jesus.

Christ-centered programs provide age-appropriate opportunities for young children to serve local or national communities in creative ways to expand learning beyond the four walls of the classroom. There is an intentional inclusion of biblical instruction, guiding children's understanding of ways to serve others that is age appropriate. They provide exposure to community servants and services through a variety of program elements.

Domain 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING	
Standard 7: Instructional Program	The school provides an instructional program that promotes a biblical worldview; supports the school's expected student outcomes; and fosters high student engagement, critical thinking, and academic growth.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Excellent early education programs use developmentally- and age-appropriate practices informed by research that provides understanding of how young children grow and learn. These practices influence instruction in all the developmental domains of the whole child: spiritual, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive. This results in an understanding of where children are in their unique God-designed development, allowing for each child to meet achievable goals while also encouraging independent exploration. Developmentally appropriate practices take into consideration the ability, interest, culture, diversity, personality and temperament of each child.

Play is a vital part of the young child's learning experience and allows them to experience God's world, express themselves, learn to manage relationships, regulate behaviors, and foster imagination. Early education programs include a variety of differentiated learning opportunities and activities that include a balance of teacher-guided instruction and child-initiated exploration. Best-practice teaching is seen when scaffolding (layered support and instruction) is present, providing repetition of information and experiences for the child.

Early education instruction within these programs incorporates elements such as curricular resources, lesson planning, designed learning experiences and exploration, adult-child interactions, and home-school relationships. Early educators employ strategies for instruction that offer a high degree of individual support for the child and set benchmarks and expectations that encourage rigor along with support to achieve these goals. All instruction is integrated with biblical principles to develop an environment that fosters a personal faith in Christ.

Successful Christian early education programs teach by guiding, not by punishing, guiding young children with nurturing love while utilizing preventative approaches, engaging environments, and clear expectations to help children be successful. Children are given age-appropriate boundaries and guidance that allows them to feel safe, loved and accepted. The program models and teaches self-regulation skills

and the ability to negotiate relationships and care for self and others. This includes intervention strategies that model skills for children (and families) that enable them to be successful in learning and life. The Christian early education program values the environment as an additional teacher. The program includes indoor and outdoor learning experiences and designs environments with a variety of safe and engaging stimuli for the different needs of each learner. The addition of an outdoor learning environment/playground enhances and supports the developmental growth of children and offers learning experiences beyond the walls of the classroom.

A wide variety of age-appropriate opportunities are provided to help move each child towards mastery of skills and concepts. Decisions about classroom resources and materials are planned and implemented with each child in mind reflecting a Biblical worldview and clearly tied to expected learning outcomes. Routines and transitions are an essential part of building a supportive classroom for young children. Transitions are planned and included as an additional time for learning.

Early education programs implementing best practices create learning environments that are developmentally appropriate for the age of the children. This approach to teaching is grounded in research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education. These carefully and intentionally planned environments promote optimal learning and development. They help each child meet challenging and achievable learning goals, yet meet children where they are, as individuals and as part of a group. Programs ensure that staff are cognizant of national Developmental Milestones for the age they instruct. Through observations and assessments, teachers gather information about each individual child to design and adapt activities that engage them in the learning process.

Technology in the early education setting includes listening centers, computer terminals, audio/visual, etc. All technology including passive media (television, DVDs, CDs), when used, meet the following requirements: 1) is appropriate to the age and the attention span, 2) enhances the effectiveness and values of the program, 3) is previewed by the staff for overall content and age appropriateness, 4) serves as an occasional supplement to daily activities rather than a significant part, and 5) includes appropriate teacher involvement in introducing and following up the viewing with questions and activities that elicit children's active involvement.

Domain 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING	
Standard 8: Curriculum Planning	The school develops, implements, and maintains curriculum documentation across grade levels and subject areas that effectively supports quality instruction.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

High quality Christian early education programs engage in curriculum planning that is systematic and addresses all ages and domains of child development and is biblically integrated. Age-specific expected learning goals and instructional strategies (based on state or national early learning standards) are represented. Comprehensive curriculum includes content, concepts, and activities that foster spiritual, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. There is clearly defined scaffolding (layered support and instruction) to the curriculum planning and documentation that describes instruction and learning goals as the child matriculates through the age-levels offered in the program. Assessment strategies are embedded in curriculum documents to provide an analysis of learning.

Domain 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING	
Standard 9: Assessment and Use of Learning Data	The school conducts and analyzes varied and authentic assessments to monitor and evaluate student learning. The school then utilizes results to inform decision making.



### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Early educators systematically gather data assessing children's learning and emerging competencies which informs the direction of future instruction. Authentic assessment incorporates a variety of strategies and can be either a published assessment or a school developed research-based tool to collect data such as observations, anecdotal notes, running records, checklists, annotated/evaluative portfolios (beyond a scrapbook of learning activities). Because of the rapid growth and development of young children, assessments for early education should be based on current industry research and conducted twice each year.

Assessments are aligned with the school's expected student outcomes and/or state early learning standards as well as screening for developmental readiness. Comprehensive assessments provide information for all areas of a child's development including spiritual, cognitive skills, language, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, health, and physical development (including self-help skills).

The program uses a variety of assessment tools and collected data to design goals and monitor progress as well as to improve instructional strategies. These tools help the school plan appropriately challenging curriculum and tailor instruction that responds to each child's strengths and needs. Assessment data helps the program gauge instructional effectiveness, attainment of learning goals, and address problems or gaps in learning. Assessments also provide information to identify children with learning challenges to begin the process of acquiring support services as needed. Assessment data is analyzed in a collaborative whole-school method and informs age-appropriate instruction and needs of each learner. Teachers receive training to understand the research-based tool and the evaluation of assessment data that informs age-appropriate instruction.

Domain 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING	
Standard 10: Professional Development and Teacher Evaluation	The school plans and implements a coordinated program of professional development and teacher evaluation that results in improved professional practice and increased student achievement.

### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Christian early education programs provide evidence that all staff possess an ongoing, growing personal faith and walk with God. This is at the root of all instruction and professional relationships. Staff have a commitment to create healthy learning environments that help children grow socially, emotionally, academically and most importantly, spiritually. Staff strive to support families' call from God to be the first and primary educator of their child.

Quality early education programs have educators who demonstrate a commitment to life-long learning by continuously pursuing spiritual and professional growth. They are professionally trained and actively engage in ongoing professional development that provides continuing growth in their skills, strategies and approaches to teaching young children. As educators grow spiritually and professionally, they self-reflect, modify, and adapt their teaching skills to meet the needs of each student. Educators regularly share training information and collaborate with their peers for ongoing professional growth and leadership development.

Early Education programs engaging in best practices have a systematic plan for professional development in instructional and biblical areas of growth, including a strategy for new staff orientation and mentoring as well as ongoing staff development throughout the course of the school year. Staff have training in the school's mission, vision, learning goals, as well as student assessment and evaluation. Programs employ observation and evaluation methods that promote integrity and high quality in all facets of the school.

Staff development in early education includes a focus on creating emotionally healthy environments where staff exhibit and teach personal and peer respect. Successful programs emphasize and train staff

to model and teach self-regulation skills, including how to express emotions with words, having reactions and responses that are appropriate and show care for others. These responses are demonstrated and modeled by staff in predictable ways, helping children develop strong social-emotional skills. Conflict resolution skills are taught and modeled to children and are infused with biblical values and scriptural examples of Christlikeness.

Domain 4: EXPERTISE	
Standard 11: Legal and Ethical Compliance	The school complies with applicable laws and regulations, while not compromising the biblical foundations of the school, and implements written policies to promote institutional effectiveness.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

To ensure their safety and physical and mental health, best practice in caring for children includes protecting them from any risk of abuse or neglect. Federal law requires all states to implement state and federal criminal background checks that include fingerprints for childcare/early education providers (def: any staff working with children 0 years-kindergarten entry). Early Education centers should conduct a complete background screening before employing any staff member, including substitutes, cooks, clerical staff, transportation staff, bus drivers, or custodians who will be on the premises or in vehicles when children are present. Drug tests/screens may be incorporated into the background screening. Written permission to obtain the background screening (with or without a drug screen) should be obtained from the prospective employee. Consent to the background investigation should be required for employment consideration. Prospective employers should verbally ask applicants about previous convictions and arrests, investigation findings, or court cases with child abuse/neglect or child sexual abuse. Background screenings should be repeated periodically, mirroring state laws and/or requirements.

Properly executed reference checks, as well as in-person interviews, help seek out and prevent potential child abuse from occurring in early education centers. Performing diligent background screenings also protects the facility against future legal challenges. In accordance with state and federal requirements for early education programs, mandated reporter training and/or certification is implemented and kept current for all employees at the school. Additionally, legal statements including licensing information, non-discrimination policy, and licensing status are visible in print and virtual materials (handbooks, website and promotional materials).

Domain 4: EXPERTISE	
Standard 12: Staff Qualifications and Resources	The school maintains human resource policies and implements practices that ensure the employment, management, and evaluation of qualified and competent Christian personnel to enhance organizational effectiveness.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

High-quality early education programs employ staff who possess formal education in early childhood, have specialized knowledge of instructional methods and age-appropriate learning goals, and are skilled in providing positive classroom environments for learning to happen. They have a keen awareness of the developmental characteristics and abilities of the children they teach.

Programs ensure that Christian early educators have developed their own personal philosophy of teaching young children based on a biblical worldview. They have staff who respect and value God's developmental design by recognizing young children think, grow, and learn differently than older children and plan for age-appropriate learning strategies. Modeling God's unconditional love while upholding biblical Christian values is a hallmark of the program.

Christian early education programs are influential in the lives of children and families because they integrate a biblical worldview into all areas of instruction, classroom environment, and developmentally appropriate practices. The program recognizes that parents are the biblically mandated primary teacher of their child and as an educator they are a partner with parents in the education of their child. They place a high importance on developing consistent, appropriate and godly relationships with students and family members. Every effort is made to carry out constructive two-way communication.

Student learning outcomes are enhanced because staff are adept at developing lessons that are based on relevant research in early childhood and meet or exceed national and state early learning standards. Staff are equipped and trained in biblical integration for instruction in all domain areas. They possess a deep desire to reflect Christlike character in all they do. Schools (and their personnel) are aware of and practice National Health and Safety Standards to ensure a positive physical environment. Highly qualified staff are engaged in ongoing professional growth and current practices for teaching young children.

Domain 4: EXPERTISE	
Standard 13: Student Support Services	The school provides advising and support services that assist students in preparing for future success while considering the unique needs of each student.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Supportive, high-quality early education is essential. Creating a caring and supportive learning environment includes the creation of a community of engaged learners and ongoing relationships with their families. Early education programs support students by advocating on behalf of young children and their families, assisting them through observation, documentation and assessment of children's learning and development. Strong early education programs know that children learn best when they have opportunities to be supported in discovering strategies that help them develop emotional, social and cognitive skills needed to become lifelong learners. These early education programs not only provide formative experiences for the youngest learners, but also provide safe and high-quality care for children.

Domain 5: RESOURCES	
Standard 14: Financial Oversight	The school operates with integrity through sound financial practices that promote institutional effectiveness and financial stability.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

School leaders are stewards. They care for the people, finances and resources that God has entrusted to them. Financial integrity and viability require regular and honest evaluation of the stewardship of the school. High quality early education programs collect financial data, financial assistance data, and enrollment data to examine solid historical trends to help plan for a better financial future. There must be a commitment to sound financial stewardship practices. Transparency with staff, and clear communication with parents helps the school maintain integrity and promotes institutional effectiveness.

Financial practices are developed in accordance with biblical principles. Financial oversight is placed with highly qualified individuals who have a commitment to the school and to maintaining business practices with integrity and transparency. They develop, review and maintain policies and procedures that guide all financial operations of the school.

Domain 5: RESOURCES	
Standard 15: Resource Planning	The school engages in long-range planning to maintain viability, provide sufficient resources, and ensure appropriate staffing to fulfill the school's mission.



### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Successful early education programs prioritize planning strategically, financially and programmatically that will take their school into the future with confidence. Long-range planning is collaborative, considering the concerns and aspirations of leadership, staff, students and families. High-quality planning requires sound financial stewardship. This is accomplished through policies and procedures that are documents and implemented to guide all business and operational practices in support of the school mission.

Domain 5: RESOURCES	
Standard 16: Facilities and Transportation	The school provides facilities that are safe, secure, well-maintained, and adequate to fulfill the school's mission. Facilities and transportation, as provided, operate according to applicable legal and safety requirements.

### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

High-quality early education environments focus on providing opportunities for child-directed learning opportunities and engagement with the classroom and outdoor environments. All environments are safe, secure, well-supervised and developmentally appropriate. Regular and preventative maintenance keeps these environments in high functioning order. Material for inquiry and engagement are organized, in good working order, age-appropriate, and sufficient in quantity. There is a plan for toy/environment cleaning and sanitization that is implemented to ensure a healthy place for all children and adults. Annual training for all caregivers ensures the school's ability to provide such an environment. State requirements as well as National Health and Safety Standards are noted and observed. The program has an established *written* plan for sanitizing toys, equipment, and the environment regularly. Annual training is required for all staff in these procedures.

Domain 5: RESOURCES	
Standard 17: Instructional Resources	The school curates and provides instructionally appropriate resources to support and enhance the educational program.

### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Instructional resources, including technology in the early education setting, involve listening centers, computer terminals, audio/visual, and any planned activities that further the learning goals. Programs engaging in best practices ensure that all instructional resources including technology and passive media (television, DVDs, CDs) are appropriate to the age and the attention span and enhance the effectiveness and values of the program. The school, in its role as curator, ensures that all media and supplemental materials used for instruction or child-use directed learning have been previewed for overall content and age appropriateness. To further the learning outcomes, instructional resources should include appropriate teacher involvement in introducing and following up with questions and activities that elicit children's active involvement.

Domain 6: WELL BEING	
Standard 18: Health and Safety	The school operates from written policies and procedures that ensure the health and safety of staff, students, and campus visitors.

### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Child guidance policies and classroom management procedures are well defined and published for parents and staff, meeting state requirements. They are consistent with the program's Christian philosophy and are viewed as components for developing children's social, emotional, and character development. Staff members implement the guidance policies and procedures with gentleness, consistency, and firmness. Redirection, reflective listening, and positive reinforcement are methods used consistently by the staff (as opposed to physical punishment, restraint, or psychological/verbal abuse). Staff receive training in this area.

Domain 6: WELL-BEING	
Standard 19: Staff Wellness	The school provides all personnel with a Christ-centered work environment, appropriate support, and encouragement to pursue a healthy lifestyle.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

The well-being, high morale and consistent professional growth of the staff are largely indicative of the confidence of the parents/guardians of children in the facility's care. High-quality Christ-centered workplaces provide employees opportunities to thrive socially, emotionally, and spiritually, in partnership with the Holy Spirit, and in cooperation with other Kingdom-minded people. Schools support a culture of diversity, accepting each staff as a uniquely created child of God, gifted with talents and abilities for their participation in ministry. High quality early education programs build capacity in their people, provide environments that are safe, collaborative and innovative. They challenge people and processes and release individuals to reach their highest Kingdom potential. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged because the school has created a healthy ministry culture. Christ-centered leaders align organizational values with biblical virtues. They steward resources so that the ministry becomes self-sustaining and self-perpetuating. They facilitate decisions and lead change in a collaborative environment.

Domain 6: WELL-BEING	
Standard 20: Student Wellness	The school provides a distinctively Christian environment in which students are well cared for, feel supported and secure, and are encouraged to pursue godly and healthy living.

#### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Effectual early education programs consult with health care professionals to establish written policies to ensure the health and safety of children in their care. Written policies and procedures are in place to create systems for wellness and illness management including (but not limited to) attendance policies related to sick child/isolation procedures, nutrition and food service, tracking of student health records (and state/federal requirements), proper handwashing, sanitization of the learning environment, toys and equipment, and personal student medical needs (allergy and special concerns). Programs that excel include instruction in these areas for children and their families.

Staff are trained in their responsibilities to cultivate emotionally healthy environments where children thrive and flourish socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Research indicates that students who feel safe and cared for have greater success at school.

## INFANT-TODDLER PROGRAM ELEMENTS

	The school provides health, safety, and supervision practices that ensure the specific needs of infants and toddlers are met.
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### Statement of Best Practice in this Domain for Early Education

Best practice in caring for infants and toddlers requires special knowledge, skill and program design. Just as a good preschool is not a scaled-down version of elementary classrooms, so too, a good infant/toddler program is distinctly different from a preschool program. Group care for infant/toddler children is demanding work. It requires both careful planning, informed by knowledge of development in the earliest years, and the flexibility to respond to the individual needs of each child and family. This includes understanding and quickly responding to the individual cues of infants and toddlers.

A key to high quality care is the quality of relationships between the infant and his/her family, between the child and the caregiver, between the caregiver and family, and among the adults in the infant/toddler program. High quality programs have an ever-increasing awareness of the importance of early development. Research shows increasing information about the capacities of newborns, the differences among very young children, the influence of family and community culture on early development, and the ability of infants and toddlers to cope with developmental challenges. Trust and emotional security develop when infants learn that their needs will be met predictably and consistently.

High quality group care for infants and toddlers encompasses critical components including promoting health and safety; serving infants in a small group, with high staff-to-child ratios; assigning a primary caregiver to each infant and toddler; encouraging continuity of care; providing responsive caregiving and individualized planning; meeting the needs of the individual child within the group context and developing a stimulating physical environment.

Quality programs help infants/toddlers flourish by providing space where they are free to explore, where they feel a sense of belonging and security, and are cared for by responsible adults interested in their emerging interests and skills. Self-confidence is fostered to help babies and toddlers learn to communicate and master challenges in their worlds. Developmentally appropriate practice with infants and toddlers requires the ability to adapt a pattern of care quickly to meet children's rapidly changing needs.

The program places a high value on establishing and maintaining the alliance between families and caregivers which requires regular communication. Programs have a systematic method for daily communication with families through written notes, phone calls, conversations and scheduled meetings, keeping them abreast of the child's health, sleeping, eating and diapering/potty training patterns as well as their interests and accomplishments.

There is a planned schedule of basic routines from which children learn quickly to predict what will happen next. While schedules are predictable, caregivers are alert and prepared to be flexible. The program adapts schedules and activities to meet the individual and group's needs. They appreciate the way toddlers repeat tasks until they master them and build upon skills and problem-solving strategies they have developed.

The program staff are educated about the risks of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and implement procedures that reduce infants' risk. Sleeping equipment and bedding meet the standards of the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission. Infants are placed on their backs and soft items are not placed with children in cribs. The program has developed a statement regarding SIDS precautions that is based on recommendations of state and national agencies. Teachers have been educated on choking hazards and how to evaluate material in the classroom for the safety of infants and toddlers.

Staff are consistent and predictable in their physical and emotional care of all children. The program creates an environment where all children are treated with respect, compassion, and gentleness, never shaking, restraining, hitting, physically punishing, or engaging in verbal abuse of a child.

Routine procedures such as diapering, eating, napping, and transitions are handled in a relaxed manner and are tailored to children's individual needs and rhythms. Parents who are breast-feeding their infants are provided with a private, comfortable location to do so and feeding plans are followed by staff. Staff interaction during diapering promotes conversation skills, language development, bonding, and it is not impersonal or perfunctory. In developing policies that address health and safety, the program has received guidance from a health consultant who has expertise in this area.