



Sunshine & Smiles: Summer with Infants & Toddlers

Summer is here, and it is a wonderful time to celebrate growth, exploration, and fun learning experiences in infant and toddler classrooms! This article is packed with tips, resources, and ideas to help support development, engagement, and high-quality interactions throughout the summer! It is also the perfect opportunity to strengthen these interactions highlighted in the [CLASS®](#) (**Classroom Assessment Scoring System**) framework. The quality of interactions between teachers and children is measured by Virginia Quality Birth to Five (VQB5) using CLASS.

CLASS Focus:

In infant and toddler settings, CLASS reminds us that how we interact matters just as much as what we teach. Every diaper change, feeding, floor play, and outdoor exploration is an opportunity to build brain structure through responsive, intentional interactions.

Emotional and Behavioral Support and Responsive Caregiving: Building Secure Relationships

For infants and toddlers, relationships are important for quality teacher-child interactions. Through warm, consistent, and responsive care, teachers create a secure

base that allows children to explore confidently.

Putting it into practice:

- Responding promptly and sensitively to cries, gestures, and cues
- Using a calm, reassuring tone
- Offering physical comfort and eye contact
- Acknowledging children's feelings ("You're upset because the toy rolled away.")

During summer months when schedules may shift or new children transition into classrooms, predictable routines and nurturing interactions are especially important. Familiar songs, outdoor blanket time, and small-group sensory play can strengthen feelings of safety and belonging.

Disclaimer: For safe sleep practices, blankets should not be used for infants during sleep. <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/safe-sleep/?>

Engaged Support for Learning: Turning Moments into Meaningful Learning

Toddlers learn through hands-on exploration and rich language exposure. CLASS encourages teachers to expand children's thinking through everyday interactions.

Summer-friendly strategies include:

- Narrating outdoor discoveries ("The grass feels cool and soft.")
- Introducing new vocabulary during water play ("pour," "splash," "empty," "full")
- Asking simple, open-ended prompts ("What happens if we roll it?")
- Imitating and extending toddlers' play

Rather than directing play, teachers observe, follow the child's lead, and gently guide learning. A toddler stacking cups becomes a lesson in size and balance. A toddler watching flowers move becomes an opportunity to describe color and sound.

Responsive Caregiving as Instruction

In Infant CLASS, caregiving routines are instructional moments. Diapering, feeding, and handwashing are rich with opportunities for connection and language development. These small, consistent interactions build trust while supporting cognitive and language growth. The goal is not perfect activities; it's meaningful exchanges. When teachers are present, intentional, and responsive, even the simplest experience becomes powerful.

Intentional caregiving might include:

- Describing each step during diapering
- Encouraging infants to participate ("Can you lift your arm?")
- Maintaining back-and-forth exchanges during bottle feeding
- Singing familiar songs during transitions

Creating Engaging Summer Environments

Creating engaging summer environments focuses on designing fun and interactive spaces that keep infants and toddlers active, curious, and connected throughout the summer. Through intentional activities and meaningful experiences, these environments encourage learning, social development, and positive engagement.

Simple summer ideas:

- Shaded outdoor tummy time with sensory baskets under close supervision
- Water painting on sidewalks
- Nature walks with descriptive language
- Music and movement under a shady tree

Why CLASS Matters in the Early Years

Research consistently shows that strong early interactions support:

- Language development
- Self-regulation
- Secure attachment
- Problem-solving skills

Final Thoughts

Summer offers a beautiful reminder that learning happens everywhere, in giggles during water play, in quiet rocking moments, and in shared discoveries outdoors. By focusing on responsive relationships, meaningful engagement, and intentional caregiving through the lens of CLASS, teachers can ensure that interaction supports growth and curiosity. When we strengthen teacher-child interactions, we strengthen outcomes in infant and toddler classrooms. For infants and toddlers, brain development is rapid. CLASS provides a shared language for teachers to reflect on and strengthen the daily interactions that shape development.

Reference:

[The Research Behind CLASS® - Teachstone](#)

Resource Spotlight



What's On Demand?

STREAMin³ on-demand online learning opportunities are a perfect fit for independent learning!

[View the on-demand online learning options](#)

Discover New Resources!



The Early Childhood Resource Hub offers teachers and families monthly resources to support infants and toddlers including booklists, read aloud guides, and lesson plans to support developmental skills. It was created by the Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at the University of Virginia with funding from the Virginia Department of Education.

[Visit the ECE Resource Hub](#)



SCHOOL of EDUCATION
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Center for Advanced Study
of Teaching and Learning



Upcoming Professional Development Opportunity

[National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\) Annual Conference](#)



National Association for the
Education of Young Children

Save the Date!

The [NAEYC Annual Conference](#) is one of the largest ECE gatherings globally. It covers a vast array of topics, from public policy to classroom assessment, and features leading experts in child development.

Registration for 2026 Annual Conference will open in July 2026!

- **Location: Washington, D. C.**

- **Date: December 5-8, 2026**



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