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Coach's Corner



Celebrating Week of the Young Child

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This April is the 50th anniversary of Week of the Young Child (WOYC). In 1971, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) established the WOYC to celebrate the early years of childhood (birth-8 years). The idea was for early childhood education programs across the nation to participate in activities and focus on all the ways we can support children and families during those early years.

Each year NAEYC publishes a calendar of events and activities but early childhood education programs are encouraged to add in their own ideas for the week! One of the simplest, yet most poignant, ways we can celebrate young children is by focusing on what they do best, engaging in play!



Play- The Language of Childhood

When we consider celebrating young children, we do not need to overthink it. Play is arguably one of the most important aspects of childhood. Many of the activities for WOYC can be incorporated into children's play. Play is essential to all areas of development including, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development. Children learn best when they are engaged in hands-on learning. Play also has its benefits for teachers. There is so much for you to observe and discover when children are playing!

Incorporating Play into WOYC

One of the themes for WOYC is "Work Together Wednesday". This theme presents a great opportunity for building or engineering. Challenge children to work with a friend to build a structure. Give them one instruction such as, building the tallest structure or using a certain number of blocks/manipulatives. This activity requires creativity, fine motor skills, and cooperation. Take time to really observe the children. Yes, this is a great time to look for specific skills for assessment purposes, but it is also a great opportunity to appreciate their imagination and excitement.

For infants and toddlers, "Work Together Wednesday" could be children working together or children working with their educator. Invite the children to explore different building materials such as blocks or Duplos. Consider putting out containers and letting the children engage in dumping and filling. The children can work together to fill the containers and then take turns dumping them. "Dump and fill" is a favorite activity of infants and toddlers!

Another theme is "Artsy Thursday". Consider setting up an art station for the day. Let the children know that the art station will be available during free play times. Pull out different supplies- paint, crayons, markers, stencils, glue, scissors, age appropriate collage materials, etc. and different mediums- different types of paper, paper towel rolls, rocks or stones, cardboard, etc. Let the children be creative! Spend time observing the children as they are creating their masterpieces. Talk to them about what they are making. Ask them about their color choices. This is also a great time to observe their language skills as they talk to you about their work. Consider displaying the children's work and having a virtual art show for the parents to view the creativity of the class!

For infants and toddlers, art activities are all about exploration. Let them explore using safe, age appropriate materials. One idea is to put a piece of paper inside a gallon sized Ziplock bag. Squirt some paint inside and then seal the bag. Let the babies squish the paint around to create their own artwork. Another thing to consider is scaffolding. We use scaffolding when we help children build upon their skills. For example, if children are building different structures for "Work Together Wednesday", help them take the activity a step further by balancing some small people or figures on the top of their structure. If they are building with blocks, encourage them to count how many square blocks they have used. This is a great way to challenge children while still letting them have control of their play.

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It is important to note that while we are observing children during play, we should remember to celebrate the small milestones. If you notice a child making improvements, be sure to point it out and remind them to be proud of themselves. It is also good practice to point out small accomplishments to parents. This helps to reinforce that sometimes, the things that may seem small to us, are a big deal to our children. This is especially important to keep in mind if you are working with children who have disabilities.

The Magic of Early Childhood

As we celebrate WOYC, I challenge each of you to take a moment to truly appreciate the magic of young children. While we spend our time educating these little ones, they are also teaching US! There is so much we can learn from young children if we are paying attention. Children live in the moment. They do not dwell on the past or worry about the future. This is likely a main reason why they experience so much joy on a daily basis. They demonstrate how to appreciate the little things. Taking a turn with a favorite toy or watching a butterfly through the classroom window can bring them so much happiness that they just have to share it with their teacher. Take some time during WOYC to focus on the joy that comes so naturally to our children. Jot down a few things that you notice and reflect on them from time to time. And most importantly take time to remember that through your work, you have an opportunity to lay the foundation for every child that enters your classroom.

We would love to hear some of the ways your program celebrated Week of the Young Child!

Professional Development

[It's Time to Play! Why Play is Important to Infants](#)

Resources

- [NAEYC- Week of the Young Child \(WOYC\)](#)
- [NAEYC- Observing, Planning Guiding: How and Intentional Teacher Meets Standards Through Play](#)

Parent Resources

- [NAEYC-10 Things Every Parent Should Know About Play](#)
- [Zero to Three- How Your Child Learns and Grows Through Play from Birth to Three](#)