

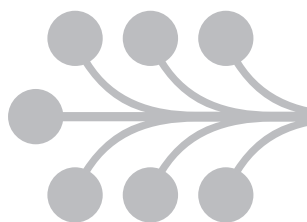
WORKING WELL WITH BABIES

Comprehensive Competencies
for Educators of
Infants and Toddlers



Claire D. Vallotton, PhD
Holly E. Brophy-Herb, PhD
Lori Roggman, PhD
Rachel Chazan-Cohen, PhD

Working Well with Babies



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Claire D. Vallotton, PhD, Holly E. Brophy-Herb, PhD,
Lori Roggman, PhD, and Rachel Chazan-Cohen, PhD

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To our children who helped us appreciate the profound wonder of
infancy and toddlerhood and the tremendous challenges and joys
of being caregivers and educators:

Colette Eron Marie Vallotton

Isabelle Catherine Herb

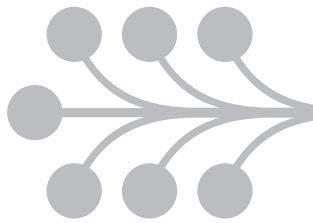
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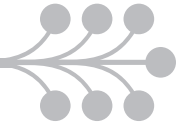
The authors of this book are sincerely grateful to the many individuals who have supported its development. First, we wish to acknowledge the Collaborative for Understanding the Pedagogy of Infant/Toddler Development (CUPID). CUPID is a group of more than fifty scientists and educators of infant-toddler development, care, and education working to better prepare and support the infant-toddler workforce by improving teaching and training of preservice and in-service practitioners. You can learn more at cupidconsortium.org. Our ultimate goal is to support the highest quality practice in the field of infant-toddler care and education; this book contributes by providing research- and standards-based resources for teaching and training. The many members of CUPID have contributed to the formation and organization of the ideas in this book, inspiring us through their research, teaching, and advocacy for the field of infant-toddler care and education. Several CUPID members have contributed directly to the writing and editing of this book:

- * Jean Ispa, who helped write the chapters Educators of Infants and Toddlers, and Guiding Infant and Toddler Behavior
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- * Kalli Decker, who helped write the chapter Supporting Development and Learning
- * Maria Fusaro, who helped write the chapter Supporting Development and Learning
- * Carla Peterson, who helped write the chapter Including Infants and Toddlers with Additional Support Needs and Their Families
- * Julia Torquati, who helped write the chapter Leadership, Mentoring, and Coaching

We have great admiration and appreciation for our colleagues who are practitioners in the field of infant-toddler education, from whom we draw

inspiration and with whom we exchange ideas that inform both research and practice. Finally, we are so grateful to the dedicated educators, generous families, and ever-exploring infants and toddlers at the Michigan State University Child Development Laboratories who let us observe and document their work and learning to provide examples and images for this book.

CHAPTER 1



Educators of Infants and Toddlers

—with Gina Cook and Jean Ispa

The science of child development paints a clear and critical picture: how well a child is doing at age three is a good predictor for how that child will do in school and even later in life. Our earliest experiences lay the foundation for how we will learn and interact with others. By age three, children already show great variation in the complexity of their brains, in the number of words they know, and in the ways they establish relationships with adults and peers. These differences are in part based on the characteristics the children were born with, but they also depend to a large degree on the children's experiences with the adults in their world.

There is growing recognition that the first three years of life are a distinct developmental period. As babies (children under three years) undergo rapid brain development, they are highly reliant on relationships with adults and highly responsive to environmental quality. During this critical growth period, the majority of infants (babies under eighteen months) and toddlers (babies between eighteen months and three years) in the United States spend time in out-of-home care each day, and at least one-third of those children are enrolled in center-based care. In fact, 40 percent of children in out-of-home care spend thirty-five hours or more per week in child care placements, clocking in more than eighteen hundred hours per year in care settings. Think of how differently this care and educational experience adds up for a child who has a highly qualified educator, compared to a child with an adult who meets their basic needs but does not have the **skills, knowledge, or disposition** to truly support their development.

These earliest years provide a unique opportunity for adults to have a long-term impact on children's future outcomes across a range of developmental domains. Research by economist James Heckman (2008) underscores the long-term societal economic advantages of investing in high-quality early childhood programming for babies and young children. No

wonder, then, that families (people with whom a child has an ongoing relationship defined by family roles, regardless of biological or legal relationship), educators, and policy makers have been paying more attention to the quality of infant and toddler care and education. For several decades, the preschool period (ages three to four) was seen as the time to make children “ready for school.” Today the infant-toddler period is the new frontier of school readiness. Educators and researchers are making efforts to professionalize the early care and education workforce, define **learning** objectives for infants and toddlers, and provide guidance in **best practices** to support school readiness beginning in infancy. For example, whereas in 2010 only thirty-one states reported having early learning guidelines (ELG) specifically for infants and toddlers, by 2013 forty-five states had such guidelines and twenty-eight states had specific certifications for infant-toddler care providers. This has led to increasing demands for professional degrees or certifications for practitioners working with infants and toddlers.

As we focus on this age group, we must guard against simply pushing frameworks developed for older children down to the infant and toddler years. In fact, new ways of conceptualizing infant-toddler outcomes and best practices could be pushed up to benefit the care and education of preschoolers. Many preschool frameworks were developed with an eye toward integrating them with elementary school guidelines, but instead preschoolers would benefit from practices used with younger children that encourage more attention to relationships and quality interactions, connections among developmental domains, exploration, and play.

In this book, we use the terms *educator* and *practitioner* interchangeably to reflect professionals working with infants, toddlers, and their families. Many titles are applied to those who work with young children and families. This book refers to *practitioners* as those who work with babies and families in any professional context, and the term *educator* for those who intentionally support others’ development and learning, including educators of infants and toddlers, regardless of their professional title. We use the term *baby* to reinforce the idea that infants and toddlers under three are vulnerable and reliant on their relationships with adults, even after they start to walk and talk. This book can be used by the practitioner who is eager to learn more about quality infant-toddler care and education and wants to develop as a professional, or it can be used as a course textbook for a student planning to work with infants, toddlers, and their families. While the book primarily addresses those who work in group care settings (center-based and family child care), figure 1.1 shows how we understand the overlapping roles within the infant-toddler workforce, including those of infant-toddler educators, home visitors (professionals who work with parents or families in the context of the family’s home) or family educators (professionals who

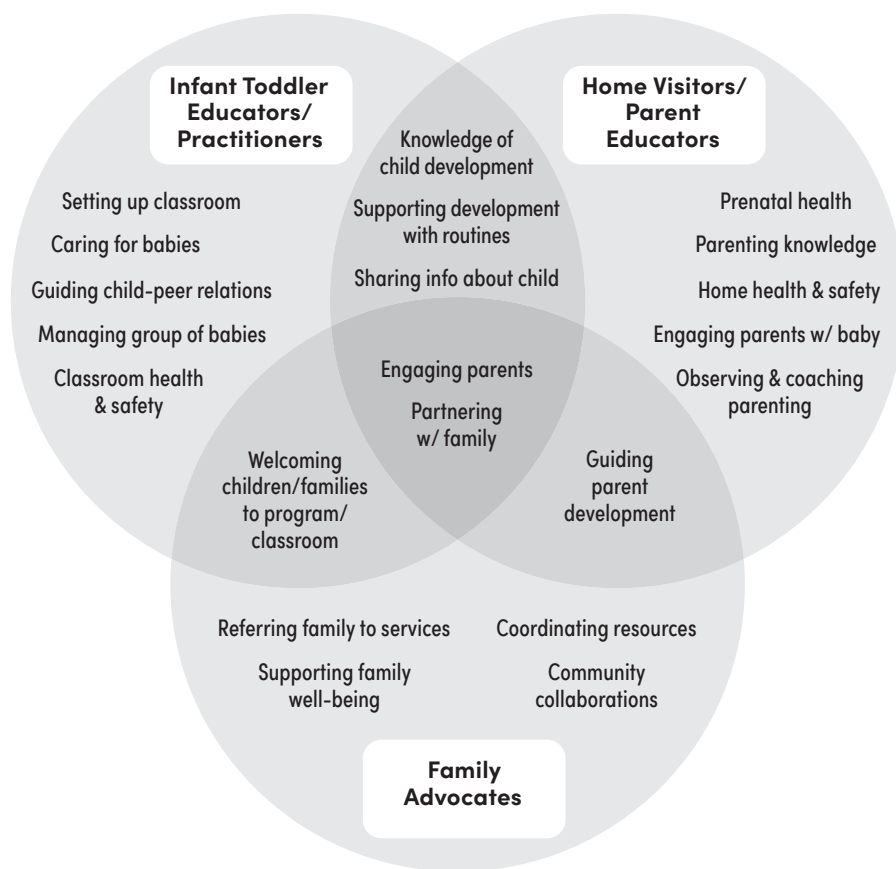


Figure 1.1. Overlapping Roles and Competencies for Infant-Toddler Professionals

provide education to families about children, parenting, and family life), and family advocates, and the shared and unique **competencies** needed for each role. The book will focus on developing these competencies—the knowledge, dispositions, and skills—that help infant-toddler educators support child well-being through direct care.

Why Focus on Infants and Toddlers? Brains, Dependency, and Relationships

Why do educators need specific skills to work with infants and toddlers? What is so special about this age, anyway? One answer is brains! The human brain grows more in the first three years of life than it will during the rest of the lifespan. This rapid growth makes the brain especially open to influences from experience. Young children (between birth and age eight years) are especially vulnerable to negative experiences but also exceptionally open to the benefits of positive experiences. Development during this period sets the stage for development and learning in preschool, elementary school, and life in general.

The second reason the first three years are unique and require special skills from educators is that babies are completely dependent upon the adults in their lives not only for safety and basic care, but also for emotional connection and cognitive stimulation. They rely on us to perceive and interpret their needs and subtle cues so that we can communicate on their behalf. Infants—and also toddlers who are just learning to talk—need the important adults in their lives to communicate with one another about their experiences, behaviors, and needs, including parents (those with a parenting role, regardless of biological or legal relationship) and other family members, other caregivers (any adult who takes care of babies in an ongoing relationship), educators, and other professionals. Babies can't do this for themselves.

The third reason this is a special time has to do with the ways in which babies' brains are shaped by relationships. As you will learn in chapter 3, consistent, caring relationships provide infants and toddlers with the sense of security they need to fully explore their environments. Exploration is important because it promotes motor and cognitive development. Moreover, babies' emotional connections with adults provide crucial stimulation for their brains, particularly the areas involved in learning about others (for example, developing empathy), developing their sense of themselves (self-worth), and expressing and regulating emotions. These are essential skills for getting along in the world.

Because of the vulnerability and opportunity of the first three years—the fast growth of the brain, the total dependence on adults, and the critical role of relationships—infant-toddler educators need unique competencies based on knowledge, dispositions, and skills, to accomplish high-quality work.

Babies Get Lost in the Field of Early Childhood Education

Another reason we focus on the competencies of infant-toddler educators is that there are few relevant sets of standards for this age level set by departments of education or accrediting agencies. Most standards for early child educator competencies either focus on teachers working with preschool-age children or are very broad, covering the whole early childhood period from birth to age eight years old. Covering such a broad age range often means the competencies most related to infants and toddlers get short shrift.

Babies—and their educators—get lost in early childhood education for reasons like these:

- 1 “Education” is assumed to start at five years old, and “early education” is assumed to start at three years old.

- 2 Educational services for children five years and older are paid for by the public, but educational services for children under five are paid for by families unless children are in early special education or other intervention programs (like those for families living in poverty).
- 3 Work with infants and toddlers has been seen as low-skill work (hence the ubiquitous term *babysitting*) and as primarily women's work.
- 4 Many professionals who work with babies and their families—including medical professionals, public health workers, and social workers—are not trained in child development or early education.

In this book, we argue that working with babies and their families involves both care and education, and it is one of the most complex and challenging jobs in our society. While this book is focused on infant-toddler educators who work in group care settings, these competencies also extend to those who work as home visitors—and in fact, these same skills are foundational for many professional roles involving work with and for babies and families.

How We Think about Babies and Their Educators

Our conceptual framework, or our way of thinking about infant-toddler care and education, is both developmental and contextual—that is, it is based on the science of child development and emphasizes how development is influenced by the many contexts of young children's lives. It is based on three beliefs: First, the first three years comprise a unique and important period in human development. Second, early development requires responsive caregiving relationships. Third, infants and toddlers learn best through active engagement and by exploring their physical and social world. These beliefs are backed by the theories and research that underlie the field's current thinking on best practices for educating and caring for infants and toddlers.

Relationships are the primary and essential context of early development, according to developmental theorists. Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (2005) represented the centrality of the caregiving relationship by putting it at the core of his bull's-eye diagram of the embedded contexts of early development, and Arnold Sameroff (2009) referred to life in infancy as “we-ness” rather than “I-ness.” These relationships are themselves embedded in community, cultural, and societal contexts that influence goals for children's development. They permeate the ways in which caregivers and families promote those developmental goals in their everyday routines, playful interactions, and other experiences that help infants learn about the world.

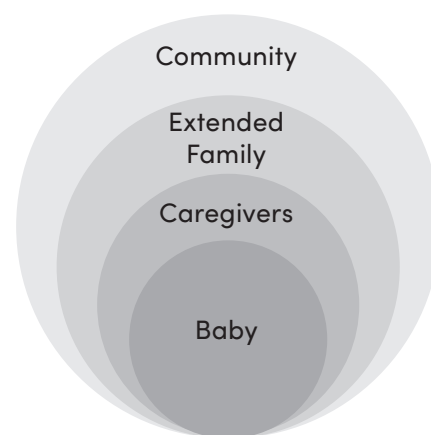


Figure 1.2. Important Relationship Contexts for Development

Attachment theory emphasizes infants' close relationships with parents and other caregivers as a crucial foundation for building confidence to explore, learn, and interact with others. Renowned attachment theorists John Bowlby (1982) and Mary Ainsworth (1979) viewed attachment—or the unique bond between a baby and caregiver (parents or others)—as the source of lifelong love and emotional well-being. Babies' sense of security in this relationship gives them the confidence to explore their worlds. This sensorimotor exploration in infancy is the origin of human intelligence, as seen by Jean Piaget, a famous psychologist who advanced our understanding of infants' and young children's cognitive development. We will share other examples of the importance of relationships in chapter 3 and talk about the important things babies learn and how they learn them in chapter 6.

Abundant research across many **cultures** shows that babies who are securely attached to their caregivers are more likely to explore new environments, develop good communication skills, and regulate their emotions and behavior than babies with insecure attachments. These skills will help them later in forming positive relationships with peers, succeeding in school, and eventually becoming responsible adults who have stable romantic relationships and warm, responsive relationships with their own children. Although children deprived of responsive care in the earliest years can be helped if they receive such care later, development is much smoother if it is provided by caregivers (including child care providers as well as family members) from the earliest days of life. Responsive caregivers support babies' exploration and guide their understanding of how relationships work and how the world works. This is why caregivers and early educators are so important to babies' development, and it is why we have written this book.

The Structure of This Book and How to Use It

This book focuses on you—the practitioner who works, or will work, with infants, toddlers, and their families. We have organized the book around the competencies needed to engage in high-quality, developmentally supportive infant and toddler programming, and we guide the reader through building these competencies. These competencies can be aligned with other national competency frameworks for early child educators, and used to set goals for **professional development**.

As seen in figure 1.3, we focus on three types of competencies—knowledge, dispositions, and skills—in nine different domains (see figure 1.4 on page 7 for competency domains). That is, we describe what you need to know, what attitudes and values promote high-quality early care and education, and what to do to become the most effective infant-toddler practitioner you can be.

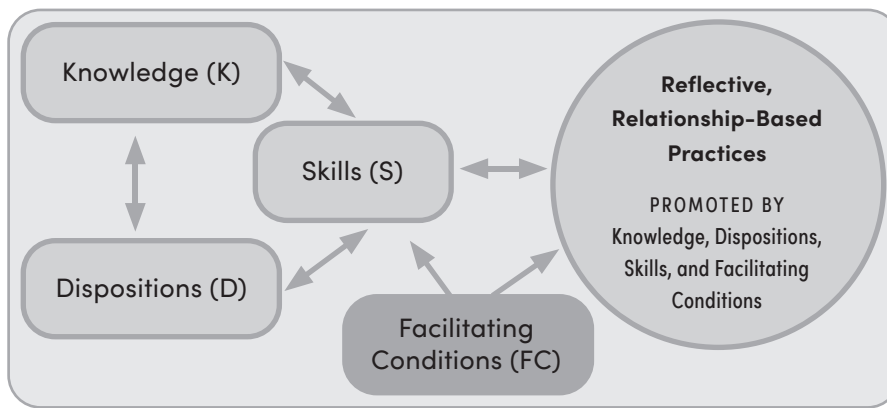


Figure 1.3. How Competencies Influence Practices

As we describe in figure 1.3, knowledge, dispositions, and skills all influence our practices with infants, toddlers, and families. Notice the two-way arrow between knowledge and dispositions, showing how they influence each other. Our dispositions—that is, our beliefs, attitudes, and values—may lead us to be more or less receptive to new knowledge and skills. Likewise, our dispositions may change as we gain new knowledge or skills. Both knowledge and dispositions contribute to the acquisition of new skills. There is also a two-way arrow between skills and practices. As we apply skills in practice, those skills get stronger and we can more easily apply them in different contexts. As you read each chapter, you will notice that when we discuss skills, we will also describe the reflective, **relationship-based practices** associated with those skills. **Reflective practices** and relationship-based practices are essential for high-quality work with children and families; you will learn more about these qualities in chapters 2 and 3. Finally, note that figure 1.3 also includes **facilitating conditions** that are necessary to enable practitioners to exercise their skills. For example, access to ongoing professional development and paid time for **curriculum** planning are facilitating conditions that allow educators to develop and implement high-quality experiences in the classroom.

Knowledge

This book provides the core knowledge you need to work well with infants, toddlers, and families. Based on the science of child development, care, and education, we focus on the things you need to understand deeply to be the most effective practitioner you can be. The science of child development continually expands, so there is more and more to know about infants, toddlers, and their families, and far more than we can fit in this book! Therefore, we point to other sources for more comprehensive knowledge in some areas. If you read this book thoroughly, at the end you will have the core knowledge you need to inform your beliefs, attitudes, and values, and to build your skills.

Dispositions

Infant mental health scholars Jeree Pawl and Maria St. John (1998) remind us that when working with babies, *how we are* is as important as *what we do*. *How we are* is about dispositions—attitudes, beliefs, and values—that support or hinder practitioners from doing their best work with infants, toddlers, and families. Beliefs and attitudes are informed by knowledge, but they are different from knowing empirical facts and are more emotional and personal in nature. They shape how we do what we do and bring out our commitment to doing our best. For example, we may *know* that picking up a crying baby is the quickest way to stop crying and that it will support the baby’s emotion-regulation skills but still harbor a feeling that picking up a baby each time they cry will spoil them. We may also know our legal and ethical responsibilities to accommodate infants and toddlers with **additional support needs**, but this is separate from valuing the contributions of each child’s uniqueness to the community of young learners. Many of the dispositions we describe in this book are those that research shows are related to high-quality practice and positive child outcomes, and others are part of the ethics and values of early childhood professional associations. While this book cannot give you dispositions in the way it can give you knowledge, each chapter describes relevant dispositions, and the Reflect Back, Think Ahead sections invite you to reflect on your own dispositions and how they affect your work.

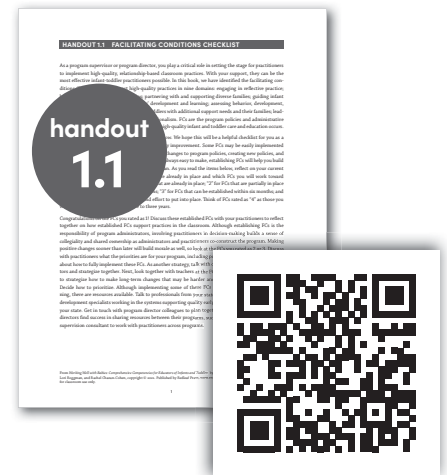
Skills

We describe skills as what you must be able to do to implement high-quality reflective practices with infants, toddlers, and families. Skills involve being able to apply your knowledge and adapt it to specific situations. How will this book help you build skills to promote high-quality practices? Learning theorist John Dewey (1933) said famously, “We do not learn from experience . . . we learn from reflecting on experience” (78). In the Professional Learning Guide (PLG [see page 11]) that accompanies this book, we provide specific ways for you to self-assess, reflect, practice, and develop your competencies. The guide will invite you to assess your own competencies and reflect on your practices to build awareness of yourself and others while challenging you to set goals and find opportunities to practice the skills you want to develop.

Facilitating Conditions

Finally, we describe the facilitating conditions that promote educators’ skills and reflective, relationship-based practices. Facilitating conditions exist

within programs (child care center, early child education setting), rather than within the individual practitioner. Without the necessary facilitating conditions, educators may have the skills to plan and engage in high-quality experiences, but they will not be able to apply them in practice with babies, nor further develop those skills. Facilitating conditions are often the program policies and administrative supports that promote educators' capacities to develop and use their skills to engage in effective, high-quality reflective practices. Establishing facilitating conditions is the responsibility of program **directors, supervisors**, and other leaders, though individual practitioners can advocate for changes that will support their high-quality practice. Facilitating conditions are described near the beginning of each chapter so that **leaders** (administrators, directors, supervisors, and **coaches**) can easily find them to understand what they must do to support educators of infants and toddlers to provide the highest quality experiences for babies. In handout 1.1, Facilitating Conditions Checklist, program administrators will find a checklist for evaluating the status of facilitating conditions in their programs and setting goals for establishing the facilitating conditions that educators of infants and toddlers need to develop and use their competencies.

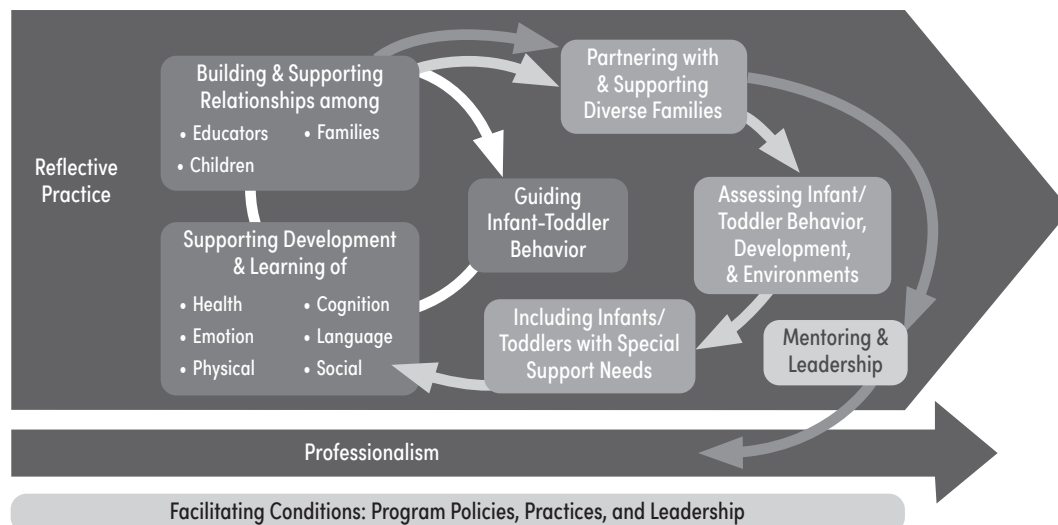


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Nine Competency Domains

The nine competency domains crucial for working as an infant-toddler educator are related to one another in important ways, as seen in figure 1.4. Reflective practice starts at the left. It is represented as a large arrow behind the other competencies because this is the starting place, and it requires ongoing attention to allow you to intentionally develop other competencies. **Professionalism** is depicted along the bottom of the figure because as

Figure 1.4. Nine Domains of Comprehensive Competencies for the Infant-Toddler Workforce



you learn about and develop the other competencies, you will grow as a professional by building knowledge of the field and being able to describe it to others. The inner circle (white arrow) represents the three central aspects of daily work with infants and toddlers: building and supporting relationships are the necessary foundation for effectively guiding infant-toddler behavior, which is a central part of supporting development and learning. The middle circle (light gray arrows) represents work that must intentionally involve families, including **assessing** infants and toddlers (and sometimes family/home environments) and working with families to include babies with additional support needs. The outer circle (medium gray arrows) reflects work with other adults, which is still founded in relationships with families but goes further to develop mentoring relationships with other adults (families, colleagues) as it relies on and builds skills in professionalism. Finally, the facilitating conditions described at the bottom of the figure underscore the fact that no one can do this important work alone. Policies, program practices and resources, and leadership make it harder or easier—and sometimes possible or impossible—to do your best work by using your competencies. Find the full list and description of all competencies and facilitating conditions in each domain in handout 1.2. Comprehensive Competencies List.



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Abbreviations for the competency domains

- Competencies for Supporting Reflective Practice (RFP)
- Competencies for Building and Supporting Relationships (REL)
- Competencies for Partnering with and Supporting Diverse Families (FAM)
- Competencies for Guiding Infant-Toddler Behavior (GDB)
- Competencies for Supporting Development and Learning (DVL)
- Competencies for Assessing Behavior, Development, and Environments (ABD)
- Competencies for Including Infants and Toddlers with Additional Support Needs and Their Families (INC)
- Competencies for Leadership, Mentoring, and Coaching (LED)
- Competencies for Professionalism (PRO)

Abbreviations for knowledge, dispositions, skills, and facilitating conditions

- Knowledge (K)
- Dispositions (D)
- Skills (S)
- Facilitating Conditions (FC)

Organization of Chapters

The order of chapters within this book is intentional to support practitioners in building their own competencies as professionals. Thus, the chapters are not organized based on what you need to know first to work with babies but rather on what you need to know first to become a professional in the field of infant-toddler education, following figure 1.4. Within each chapter, we begin with an overview of the competency dimension and its importance to infant and toddler programming. We describe the facilitating conditions for building and exercising the competencies in that chapter. Then we address the knowledge, dispositions, and skills needed to provide high-quality infant and toddler care and education.

Throughout this book, you will be invited to engage in **reflection** on yourself as a learner and a practitioner. The capacity to engage in self-reflection is critical to our own personal growth and our growth as professionals. Self-reflection brings increased awareness and understanding of self and others, helping us to act with intentionality and flexibility in our work. As you read each chapter addressing each of the nine competency areas, think about a goal you will set for yourself in that area. In the last chapter of this book, we have included a brief self-assessment in which you can reflect on how your knowledge, dispositions, and skills have changed over the course of reading and thinking about the content in this book.

Additional Material Available Online

Infant-toddler care and education are complex and make for a challenging job. This book attempts to be comprehensive in addressing the competencies needed by practitioners, but it cannot contain everything you need. Thus, we provide additional material online to extend what is offered in the book.

- * Professional Learning Guide (PLG) to Competency Development: a workbook containing opportunities to self-assess, reflect on, practice, and develop your professional competencies related to each chapter in this book, including this one.
- * Key Terms: an alphabetical list of important concepts described throughout the book, with definitions.
- * Resources and Further Readings: suggestions for further reading and additional resources related to the content of each chapter.



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Discover the nine core competencies needed for working with babies

Babies—and their educators—can get lost in early childhood education. “Early education” is assumed to start at three years old and many infant-toddler professionals are not trained in infant-toddler development; but working with babies and their families is one of the most complex, challenging, and important jobs in our society. *Working Well with Babies* identifies three types of competencies—knowledge, dispositions, and skills—in nine domains that will help you become the most effective infant-toddler practitioner you can be.

The nine competencies are

- Reflective Practice
- Building and Supporting Relationships
- Partnering with and Supporting Diverse Families
- Guiding Infant and Toddler Behavior
- Supporting Development and Learning
- Assessing Behavior, Development, and Environments
- Including Infants and Toddlers with Additional Support Needs
- Leadership, Mentoring, and Coaching
- Professionalism

Essential relationship-based and reflective practices for high-quality work with children and families are highlighted for each skill. Based on the science of child development, care, and education, *Working Well with Babies* is the ideal resource to create infant-toddler communities of learning.

Claire D. Valloton, PhD, associate professor of Human Development & Family Studies, Michigan State University, leads the Collaborative for Understanding the Pedagogy of Infant/Toddler Development (CUPID).

Holly E. Brophy-Herb, PhD, professor of Human Development & Family Studies, Michigan State University, studies how parents and teachers socialize very young children's emotions, and how emotion socialization practices relate to early social-emotional development.

Lori Roggman, PhD, professor emeritus of Human Development, Utah State University, focuses her research on how parents support their child's early development and how effective home visiting practices promote developmental parenting.

Rachel Chazan-Cohen, PhD, associate professor of Human Development and Family Sciences, University of Connecticut, is particularly interested in the biological, relational, and environmental factors influencing the development of at-risk children and, most especially, on the creation, evaluation, and refinement of intervention programs for families with infants and toddlers.