



- Research has found that children who receive high-quality child care as infants and toddlers demonstrate better language, cognitive and social skills than children who have not been afforded such high-quality early learning experiences (Burchinal, Roberts, Nabors, & Bryant, 1996).
- The beneficial effects of quality infant toddler care have also been shown to last well into the elementary years (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002)
- Infants and toddlers also have care and learning needs that are distinct from preschool-aged children

#### Regional Need:

- Having a skilled, knowledgeable, well-prepared and well-supported workforce that *understands the unique needs of infants and toddlers* during these essential developmental periods ensures that children receive the care and stimulation that they need to thrive.
- *Yet in most states and local communities, both in- and pre-service professional development is geared toward those working with preschool-aged children.*
- This has created a clear gap in the professional preparation and support systems that are necessary for infant and toddler teachers.

#### A “Marriage” of Quality Enhancement and Professional Development:

- First Relationships is a comprehensive professional development and onsite support program for infant and toddler child care staff and has been designed to promote children’s positive development based on a set of *inter-related principles* grounded in developmental science.
- It is guided by the understanding that young children’s exploration is predicated on having responsive caregivers. Caregivers who consistently and contingently respond to children’s needs instill children with a sense of trust and security in their caregiver’s availability
- Consistency and continuity in the caregiver-child relationship is therefore considered a fundamental condition for children to develop secure attachment relationships with their teachers and places caregivers in better positions to learn about children’s unique cues and respond sensitively to their needs.
- Caregiving consistency and continuity also enables teachers to better understand children’s individual learning agendas and to facilitate meaningful experiences for young children that build off of one another to assist children in organizing their worlds. (Instructional support)
- First Relationships’ goal is to support programs in implementing primary caregiving, reducing the amount of transitions young children experience, and creating continuity in children’s relationships, settings, and routines.

## Directors/Owners:

- Larger systems approach: First Relationships also recognizes that in order for infant and toddler teachers to develop positive and nurturing relationships with children and to create continuity in children's experiences, ***teachers need to work in environments that support both the well-being of children and the well-being of teachers***, as the two are intimately linked (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990).
- First Relationships includes directors in all components of the training so that they can enhance their own knowledge of infant development, remove programmatic barriers and practices that contribute to caregiving discontinuity, and develop policies and practices that support teacher well-being, growth and retention.

## Program Design

First Relationships contains four key elements: 1) four PITC modules, 2) in-classroom coaching, 3) community of practice meetings, and 4) classroom grants.

***Program for Infants and Toddlers (PITC)***: Directors and infant toddler teachers together attend **four** all-day training sessions over the course of five months.

- a. Infant social-emotional growth, development and socialization
- b. Six program practices that support the development of children's attachment security with their teachers, including primary caregiving, small groups, continuity of care, individualization of care, culturally responsive care, and inclusion of children with special needs.
- c. Developmentally appropriate curriculum for infants and toddlers
- d. Programmatic implementation of continuity between the children's home and the program and implement culturally responsive care

Participants in First Relationships can also elect to take the training series for course credit through a Community College.

## Coaching:

- First Relationships also includes a practice-embedded component.
- Each infant toddler classroom works with a coach who visits their classroom monthly (or more as needed) to support the implementation of PITC practices in the classroom and to consult on and collaboratively problem-solve any issues that teachers are facing.
- In addition, directors meet with coaches monthly and use the Program Administration Scale (Talan & Bloom, 2010) as a basis for developing policies and practices to support teacher development, retention, and to improve the quality of work life.

## Communities of Practice:

- Monthly teacher and director communities of practice meetings are held over the course of a year. These sessions are designed to help teachers and directors think about innovative ways to individualize curriculum, create continuity in children's experiences, and to support teacher development by creating a network for professional support.

## Classroom Grants:

- Grants are given to individual classrooms to enhance the safety of the environment and to purchase materials and equipment to make the environment more stimulating for children's exploration and learning.