



Primary Care

What is Primary Care?

Primary Care is the linkage of each child and their family to one caregiver in any group setting. The Primary Caregiving approach provides a foundation for healthy, secure relationships and nurtures the individual strengths, areas that require strengthening, and development of each child. In addition to fostering child and caregiver attachment relationships, the primary caregiving approach supports a goodness of fit model, enriches communication, and solidifies relationships with families.

How do Early Childhood Practitioners Establish Primary Care Groupings?

Ratios, licensing regulations, culture of child & educator, peer relationships and special needs are all worthy of consideration when establishing primary care groupings. Determining a *Goodness of Fit* between each child and the child's preferred educator should be central to the process. Steps to pairing a child to a primary caregiver should include:

- Time to observe the child in care during pre-start visits. In these observations note should be taken in regards to which educator the child seeks as a secure base from which to explore and/or as a play partner. Previous relational experience and temperament may impact the child's 'Goodness of Fit' preference in educator.
- Consultation with the family to explore culture, first language, feeding & sleeping practices, parenting style, child strengths and areas that require further strengthening.
- A flexible approach that allows for open conversation to occur if a child shifts their preference in who they prefer as their primary caregiver.

Commonly Asked Questions about the Primary Care Approach

What happens when a child in my primary care group cues that they prefer another educator to care for them?

Children are very adept at figuring out who can best meet their needs and—these needs can sometimes change over time. Observing to see if this shift in preference is temporary,

Some Benefits of this Model of Care

The attachment relationship of the child & educator is more secure

The caregiver is more "in tune" with each child as reading of cues is refined.

An awareness of each child's health status is keener

or if it has become fixed, is crucial. Once this is established educators can engage in open dialogue to strategize a possible reconfiguration of the children in their primary care groupings.

Does this mean that I no longer work in a team?

Primary Care requires a strong team effort. Sharing of information amongst educators to support secondary & tertiary care is paramount. Collaboration between team members is essential as it gives children the message that all educators can be trusted and accessed as a secure base.

What is the difference between primary care & continuity of care? If I practice one model, do I have to practice the other?

Primary Care is the pairing of each child to an educator using a 'goodness of fit' approach. Continuity of Care occurs when an educator stays with their small grouping of children from the time that they enter care until the child(ren) are at least 3 years of age. Although these models are both indicators of high quality care that complement one another, Primary Care can be practiced without integrating a Continuity of Care approach.

When each child is paired with a primary caregiver, the field of Early Childhood Education acknowledges the core need of each child to connect intimately with one caregiver who is in tune with their individual temperament, development, regulatory behaviors and styles of communication and learning. Primary Care is at the heart of any program that is committed to family centered relationship based practice.