

Affectionate Touch

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

I. Interactions and Relationships

A. The provider's verbal and non-verbal communication with children helps build positive relationships and conveys support, respect and trust.

7. With sensitivity to children's preferences, the provider shares affection with each child (for example, hugs, a lap to sit on, a hand to hold).



Waddle in Family Child Care



Summerville Learning & Dev Center



Denver's Little Sunshine

The Basics

From birth, affectionate touch is a catalyst of healthy physical and social-emotional development. Affectionate touch between caregiver and child may include holding, carrying, gentle stroking, hugging, and massaging. Young children show individual preferences for the type, frequency, and intensity of touch through expressions of...

- ❖ **well-being** like smiling, cooing, settling in, and relaxing muscles and
- ❖ **discomfort** like crying, fussing, pulling away, and tensing muscles.

Why is touch an essential component of early childhood? Decades of research on the impact of affectionate touch in early childhood, particularly in infancy, showcases the following benefits:

- Improved sensory processing and cognitive function by stimulating touch-activated neural pathways (McGlone, Wessberg, & Olausson, 2014).
- Improved regulation of stress, attention, and reward-seeking behavior by releasing oxytocin.
- Lowered risk of mental and physical illness by stimulating healthy immune function.
- Improved social and emotional adjustment by encouraging a secure child-caregiver bond (Carozza & Leong, 2021).

How do I balance the individual needs of children in care? Family child care educators care for children with various developmental needs and individual preferences for closeness. Some children need

more affectionate touch than others to feel calm and safe. Depending on your group of children, it may be impossible to meet all children's needs for physical closeness throughout the day. Supplement affectionate touch with a variety of touch-based sensory opportunities, like soft toys, playdough, and water, to support children seeking additional tactile stimulation.

[What if I feel overwhelmed?](#) Educators may experience sensory overload that results in feeling “touched out” or overwhelmed with children's needs for touch and physical closeness. Model for children how you take care of your sensory needs. For example, “I need a break from you sitting in my lap. Would you like to sit on the couch or the rug?” For an example with an infant, “I know you just want to be held right now. I need a break. I am going to lay you down here, sit next to you, and rub your belly.”

[I want to learn more!](#)

- [Touch – Why We Need It](#) (Resource)
- [The Power of Touch](#) (Video)
- [Keeping the Caring Touch in Early Childhood](#) (Article)
- [The Role of Affectionate Caregiver Touch in Early Neurodevelopment and Parent–Infant Interactional Synchrony](#) (Research article)

[Books available through Satellite's lending library:](#)

(for Satellite participating programs only)

- *Essential Touch: Meeting the Needs of Young Children* (Carlson, 2006)
- *I Love You Rituals* (Bailey, 1996)

