

From NH Early Learning Standards June 2016– Birth Through Five

Purpose of the NH Early Learning Standards

The New Hampshire Early Learning Standards are a statewide resource for everyone who loves, cares for, and educates young children. The Standards provide essential information to support and enhance children's development and learning.

Early Development – Setting the Foundation

Today we know a great deal about how children grow and develop. Children are learning at birth – even before. The early years are the most extraordinary period of growth and development in a child's lifetime. A child's very first year is crucial for building the brain. A child's senses, language, and knowing (cognition) all burst into high gear from before birth and in the first 12 months of life. Interactions with parents, early childhood professionals, and other caring adults play a key role in brain development. There are less than 2000 days from the time a child is born until he or she enters kindergarten. Every day counts.

How Children Learn

Learning starts with families and communities...

Families are their children's first, most important, and life-long teachers...Family and community traditions, languages, and activities are the foundation for children's learning and development. Children build their identities from the people, communities, and places in their lives.

Good communication among families, caregivers, and teachers is essential for children's learning. Children are in several different environments during the course of a day. To promote consistency for children, families can talk with caregivers and teachers early on about the family's traditions, language, daily routines, and the child's preferences for food and activities. Together, they can look for ways to provide continuity, such as having consistent meal times and healthy foods.

Every child and family has unique gifts and abilities...

Each child has a unique set of strengths, talents, and interests, along with areas where he or she needs more support. Children grow and learn at their own pace. It is not possible to tell exactly when a child will perfect a given skill. For some children, health care needs, disabilities, or developmental delays may

affect how and when they learn and grow. It is important for adults to support children where they are, developmentally, to extend their learning and development.

Children who have disabilities or developmental delays, or who are at risk for delays, may need special attention. Like all young children, they are developing the ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings and learning about social cues. Early childhood professionals support the social and emotional development of all children, including providing individual guidance as needed. For example, some children face challenges in developing successful relationships with other children or in sustaining play. Screening and early intervention are crucial.

Children learn best when they are healthy, safe, and have good nutrition...

Children need to have their basic needs met in order to learn. Well-child visits provide important reviews of development, behavior, immunizations, oral health, vision, and hearing. Every day, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, and physical activity help children grow, and set the stage for lifelong healthy habits and learning. Children also need safe places to live and play. They need to learn when and how to call on a trusted adult for help.

Children learn through relationships, play, and active exploration...

Children learn through the relationships they have with their parents, families, early childhood professionals, and communities. Children observe their families and caregivers closely and respond. When children reach out for connections with adults and adults reciprocate, this back-and-forth process of “serve and return interactions” helps build children’s brains.

Nurturing relationships help children become secure, confident, curious, and communicative people. These relationships help children learn how to control and express their emotions and relate to others.

Children also learn through play and exploration. In play children express their zest for living. They learn hands-on through interacting with the world around them. They observe, listen, touch, taste, and smell. They try things out and notice what happens. They use their creativity and imagination.

Learning and development build on prior learning and development...

Children learn in the same way that a house is built, from the bottom up. Early experiences set the foundation for the architecture of the maturing brain, establishing the base for all the learning, health, and behavior that follows. It’s important that this foundation be strong and sturdy. The NH Early Learning Standards provide examples of what children are learning to be, do, and know at different ages, whether at home, in their communities, or in formal early learning settings. The steps in growth and learning may span several ages as they develop, because children develop and grow at their own

individual pace. The figure below shows how learning builds on prior learning and progresses across ages.

How Learning Builds: Approximate Age When Reading Skills Develop				
Reads closely to find main ideas and supporting details in a story				
Retells familiar stories using beginning, middle, and end				Continues
Pretends to read a book or tell a story or during play			Continues	Continues with actual reading and storytelling
Enjoys being read to and talked to, focusing on the person speaking		Continues	Continues	Continues
	Young Infants (0 to 11 months)	Ages 3 to 4	Age 5 and Kindergarten	3rd Grade

Building executive function is crucial for learning and development...

Children who are feeling good, and feeling good about themselves, develop key self-management skills, called executive function. Children develop these skills through interactions with adults, starting at birth. Developing executive function helps children learn to: pay attention; reason logically; exercise judgement; control their impulses; plan; identify goals and persist to achieve them; and assess what is happening and adjust as needed. These are the kind of skills that will support their later academic success. Families can help by:

- Being responsive to the child’s needs
- Encouraging the child to try different ways to do something
- Playing hide-and-search games with the child
- Playing games that require following “rules” that you and the child agreed on and can change together, such as when playing make-believe
- Providing ample time and enough materials for make-believe play with other children
- Asking the child what he or she is doing and feeling, and why
- Asking the child: “What else could you do? What do you think would be best?” in a nonjudgmental, interested tone
- Sharing your own thinking about what you are doing and feeling, and why
- Problem-solving with the child in daily activities
- Creating an environment that allows the child to play freely, explore, and make choices

- Encouraging and allowing the child to move through different activities at his or her own pace
- Listening to and talking about the child's ideas and thoughts
- Noticing what allows laughter to bubble up and playing in ways that allow for the child's laughter (avoiding tickling, which can feel overwhelming and overstimulating)
- Involving the child in cultural activities
- Talk with your child in your home language

Children learn in and through their environment...

Whether a child is in an early learning setting or at home, the environment plays an important role in learning. Some questions to consider in developing environments that support children's learning and development include:

- Does the environment create a sense of belonging?
- Does it reflect the child's family and culture?
- Is it safe and organized? Is it aesthetically inviting and engaging?
- Are the spaces flexible and accessible?
- Does the environment give the child opportunities to explore, wonder, and try new things? Does it inspire curiosity?
- Is it appropriate for the child's age and stage of development?
- Do materials allow a variety of uses? Are there different things to see, hear, and feel – indoors and out?
- Are there opportunities for the child to be physically active and use the hands and fingers?

*Children's environments are likely to include technology and screen media. It's important for adults who care for young children to know that advances in technology are moving much faster than research about the impact of screen media on children's learning and development. **As of yet, there is no research to show that children under age 2 learn or benefit from exposure to screen media, and there is some evidence of potential harm.** Because of this, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting or avoiding screen media for children under age 2.*

Learning is interrelated...

A child's growth and development in one area influences and/or depends on development in another area. No one area of development and learning is more important than another. All areas of development reinforce each other.

Example of Interrelated Learning: Exploring Outdoors	
Activity	Area of Development
Short outdoor explorations give an infant new sounds to hear, things to see, smells, and motions. They help an older child develop coordination and physical health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical and Health • Cognitive: Approaches to Learning • Creative Expression and Aesthetic Appreciation
Listening with interest to what the child says and adding more details help the child develop trust and comfort with familiar adults.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and Emotional • Language and Emergent Literacy
Asking questions about what you see outdoors, such as, "where do you think the ant is going with the load he's carrying?" encourages the child's creativity and curiosity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and Emergent Literacy • Cognitive: Science and Social Studies • Cognitive: Approaches to Learning
Having the child describe and compare the color, size, shape, and surroundings of things you see outdoors develops the child's thinking and observation skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and Emergent Literacy • Cognitive: Early Numeracy
Taking turns naming things you see helps increase the number of words the child knows and expands his or her knowledge about the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and Emergent Literacy • Cognitive: Science and Social Studies