Early Learning Matters

ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months

5th Edition

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Suggested Citation for ELM Curriculum: ELM Curriculum Development Group (2018). *Early Learning Matters (ELM) Curriculum*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University.

Suggested Citation for ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months: Powell, D. R. with Robinson-Rucker, C., Veen, L., & Elicker, J. (2021). *ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months.* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University.

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Development of the Early Learning Matters (ELM) Curriculum was supported by the U.S. Department of War Child Development Competitive Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), grant number 2013-48762-21537 to Purdue University as part of the DoW-USDA Partnership for Military Families. The ELM Curriculum is based in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-2055. Douglas Powell, Principal Investigator. Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, Co-Principal Investigator.

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Introduction to the ELM Curriculum

Birth–36 Months

The Early Learning Matters (ELM) Curriculum is a comprehensive, research-informed program to support the optimal learning and development of children from birth to five years of age. The curriculum promotes skills linked to school readiness and life success with the best practices available. The practices include developmentally appropriate teaching strategies and the proven benefits of a coordinated mix of staff-guided and child-initiated learning experiences. ELM offers practical, easy-to-use resources designed to support a range of staff backgrounds and to support children's learning in families.

ELM is based on results of rigorous research on early childhood programs that enable young children to get off to a good start in school and in life. The curriculum is also based on the developmentally appropriate practice position statement[1] and program accreditation standards[2] of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The development of ELM included pilot testing in military child development centers and in-depth reviews of curriculum plans by prominent early childhood content experts and program leaders.

ELM was developed by Purdue University for the U.S. Department of War Child Development Program and civilian programs of early care and education. The curriculum is available free of charge through Purdue University (www.elmcurriculum.org). Information about ELM may be requested at: elmcurriculum@purdue.edu.

ELM's resources for supporting the development and learning of children birth to 36 months of age are the focus of this *User Guide*. There is a separate *User Guide* for working with children 3–5 years of age.

Birth to Three Years as a Distinct Period of Development

The first three years of life have long been viewed as a distinct period that provides the foundation for later development. Studies show that school readiness and positive life outcomes begin in infancy.[3] Early growth is rapid and consequential in all major areas of development, including the following:

- brain development, especially rates of neural connections
- motor and perceptual skills that enable infants and toddlers to actively explore their worlds
- regulation of behaviors, emotions, and thoughts
- quality of interactions and relationships with others
- communication and language abilities, and
- thinking skills related to explorations of objects and solving problems.

The remarkable amounts of change that occur in infants and toddlers offer unique opportunities to influence outcomes.[4] Experts recommend program approaches that build on distinguishing characteristics of learning and development in the early years.[5] Particularly valuable are responsive interactions and flexible experiences that encourage individual children to pursue their interests and stretch toward what they do not yet know or cannot yet do.[6]

Experiences that effectively support the learning and development of infants and toddlers are qualitatively different than developmentally appropriate experiences for preschool-age children. This principle is represented in emerging definitions

of curricula for infants and toddlers,[7] and is firmly reflected in the design of the ELM Curriculum.

The configuration of activities helps caregivers tune in to a child. The vast majority of ELM activity options for infants are one-to-one experiences, for example. Activities that involve a gathering of children are generally small and always flexible in amount and type of participation.

Learning activities offered in the ELM Curriculum include options and adaptation suggestions for individualizing experiences. There is extensive guidance on ways to accommodate a child's interests and abilities prior to and during an activity. The activities are to be embedded in a daily schedule that is predictable and flexible, and used in the context of secure relationships among caregivers and children.

ELM activities support specific areas of development with play-based experiences while recognizing all areas of development are interrelated. Activity goals emphasize process, not fixed outcomes, and are written from the perspective of a child's experiences. The activity descriptions include a range of caregiver strategies for promoting a child's explorations.

ELM activities are organized by sequences in which infants and toddlers typically develop skills and knowledge. ELM reflects early childhood experts' recommendation that a connected, integrated curriculum is more effective than a curriculum that introduces content in small, unrelated chunks.[8] At the same time, the design of the curriculum assumes development often does not proceed in a straight line and that there are considerable differences across children in rates of development.

The period of birth through 36 months involves more routine care activities than later periods of development. The work of infant-toddler program staff entails both teaching and caregiving. The Areas Promoted by ELM section of this *Guide* includes suggestions for incorporating supports for learning and development into basic care routines, especially mealtimes, transitions to rest, and diapering. Also, the curriculum's guidance on observing individual children's developmental progress includes opportunities to observe a child's actions during care routines.

For infant-toddler caregivers, the ELM Curriculum eliminates the daunting task of developing or finding activities that represent current and credible information on how to bolster early learning and development. ELM views caregivers as experts in selecting and adapting ELM activities that meet the needs of each child. Caregivers are in the best position to know the children in their room and to determine the types of experiences that are likely to help children move forward in learning and development.

ELM activities for infants and toddlers are organized by three age groups: birth–12 months, 12–24 months, and 24–36 months. Activities in the birth–12 months group assume infants enter an early childhood program at six weeks of age or older.

Key Characteristics of ELM: Intentional, Meaningful, Plentiful

At the heart of ELM are activity plans that suggest learning experiences for young children. Each plan for infants and toddlers offers options and guidance for caregivers in how to tailor experiences to the needs of individual children. ELM resources are intentional, meaningful, and plentiful. Each of these characteristics is described below.

Intentional

Caregivers who make a significant difference in children's lives are intentional in supporting children's learning. Experiences that help children move forward in their development and learning do not happen by chance. The environment and experiences in high-quality rooms are thoughtful and purposeful, and caregivers respond to unexpected events during the day with a clear focus on goals for children's learning.[9] ELM is organized around a comprehensive set of early childhood knowledge and abilities that provide a solid foundation for success in school and in life.

The knowledge and abilities are called **foundation skills** in the ELM Curriculum. They represent strong research evidence and compelling recommendations of early childhood experts regarding understandings of content to promote in the early years.

ELM actively supports the development of 14 foundation skills across five broad areas for children birth to 36 months of age. The five areas represent conceptual and developmental domains included in NAEYC's accreditation criteria.[10] The skills are described in this *Guide's* section on Areas Promoted by ELM, and are summarized in the accompanying chart.

ELM activity plans recognize that areas of development are interrelated, as noted earlier. Infants and toddlers do not experience and understand their worlds through traditional content domains or themes that make sense to adults but offer little or no meaning for very young children.[11] Examples of how activities promote development and learning in multiple areas are offered in the Effective Use of ELM section of this *Guide* (see How to Use Activity Plans).

ELM reflects NAEYC's accreditation standard for a high-quality curriculum.[12] The curriculum offers a detailed written plan that specifies desired goals for children's learning and development and learning experiences designed to achieve the desired goals. The desired goals are clearly defined, aligned with NAEYC standards, and communicated in straightforward terms that are accessible to families. The learning experiences consist of a flexible arrangement of practices, materials, and settings that build on children's current skills and past experiences.

Experts in developmentally appropriate practices for infants and toddlers emphasize the importance of caregivers promptly responding to spontaneous opportunities to support a young child's learning and skill development. A caregiver's response optimally draws on a curriculum's overall plan for supporting early learning and development, including strategies for supporting foundation skills.[13] A caregiver who notices a young child trying to move into a crawling position during an open-ended floor time, for example, could easily use a curriculum activity focused on emerging crawling skills (see Examples of Caregiver Selections of Activity Options in the Effective Use of ELM section of this *Guide*).

ELM promotes foundation skills and learning goals in the **sequence** in which children typically develop specific understandings and abilities, as noted earlier. The curriculum builds on the developmental paths that children typically follow, including patterns of progression toward more advanced skills over time. ELM activity plans also recognize that infants and toddlers often engage in

forward and backward movement with an emerging ability. An ELM activity focused on walking skills, for example, acknowledges that a toddler may use a combination of walking and crawling to reach a destination.[14]

The concept of general progression in children's learning and development is part of NAEYC's developmentally appropriate practice position statement.[15] Sequencing the order in which skills are introduced to children distinguishes a well-planned curriculum from a collection of activities that may not intentionally support mastery of beginning skills before expecting children to pursue more advanced content.

Experts on best practices with infants and toddlers consistently emphasize the value of responsive interactions.[16] Research demonstrates the contribution of responsive interactions to early learning. For example, a study found that two-year-old children learned new words when conversing with an adult in person or via video chat that involved responsive, back-and-forth interactions. The toddlers did not learn new words through prerecorded video instruction, an arrangement that was not responsive to a child.[17]

Experts also recommend caregivers use a range of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies with infants and toddlers.[18] This is consistent with

Foundation Skills: Birth–36 Months

Communication/ Language	Receptive language Expressive language Awareness of print and pictures Awareness of differences in sounds
Cognitive	Object inquiry Problem-solving
Self-Regulation	Self-control Concentration Executive function
Social-Emotional	Social interaction skills Awareness of emotions
Physical/Health	Gross motor development Fine motor development Good health practices

NAEYC's third standard for program accreditation, which calls for high-quality classrooms to use a variety of teaching strategies.[19]

What do responsive interactions look like in the ELM Curriculum? Each ELM activity plan for infants and toddlers commonly emphasizes several or more of the following 10 caregiver actions:

- **Acknowledge**: Describing a child's explorations, utterances, facial expressions, gaze, and pointing is a way to acknowledge a child's efforts and let a child know you are engaged and interested.
- **Encourage**: A child's natural curiosities provide a strong motivation to explore. Brief comments of encouragement can support a child's persistence in pursuing an interest.
- **Question**: Asking a simple question is helpful to a child's explorations regardless of whether a child knows or uses words. ELM activity descriptions frequently suggest questions that are accompanied by gestures, pointing, and inviting facial expressions. Questions can help a child focus on an interest and consider choices. A question is also an invitation to participate in an interaction.
- **Serve and return**: Activity plans across all ages of infants and toddlers frequently promote a back-and-forth exchange between caregiver and child. This reflects the serve-and-return concept promoted by Harvard's Center for the Developing Child in the context of supports for brain development.[20] An infant's coo or babble is a serve. A caregiver's prompt imitation of the coo or babble is a return. Acknowledging a child's response to a question, whether it is a smile or a look, is a form of a return.
- **Pause**: A pause is a frequently suggested strategy for promoting interaction and exploration in ELM activity plans. A pause is often recommended in examples of caregiver talk and after an object is offered to a child. A pause is an implicit invitation for a child to look, think, touch, communicate, and figure out what to do. A pause also gives a caregiver a brief moment to observe a child's interests and approach to an object or activity.
- **Pace**: The pace at which an activity is pursued with a child is an important part of responsive interactions. Activity plans often encourage caregivers to follow a child's lead with regard to pace. Caregivers sometimes hurry through an activity because they are concerned a child will lose interest. Experts remind us that young children's attention spans are often much longer than adults imagine, and sustained time with an object or activity can support in-depth learning.[21]
- **Provide information**: It's valuable for infants and toddlers to learn that each object and action has a particular name, and to eventually learn the names of common objects and actions. Activity plans frequently suggest a caregiver repeat the names of objects while pointing, and describe an object a child is exploring. Some activities for older toddlers systematically emphasize the names of peers.
- **Demonstrate**: Some activity descriptions suggest ways to show how something works. For example, activities aimed at helping toddlers learn how to calm down after a stimulating experience include the option of a caregiver demonstrating how to calm our bodies, such as breathing slowly and deeply.
- **Give assistance**: Activity plans often suggest a caregiver offer to help a child manipulate an object or do a task. For example, activities that involve toddlers taking apart and putting together items that connect frequently suggest a caregiver offer assistance, such as holding one of the items while a toddler moves another item. Activity plans commonly emphasize that help should be offered only when an action seems especially challenging to a child and when the child accepts an offer of help. The intent is for the child to remain in charge of his/her exploration.

- **Request**: The teaching strategy of giving directions for an action generally takes the form of a request or invitation in ELM activity plans. In a gross motor activity with older toddlers, for example, a child is invited to roll a ball back and forth with a caregiver.

Additional ways that ELM supports responsive interactions with a child(ren) are summarized in the Effective Use of ELM section of this *Guide* (see Caregiver Talk).

Meaningful

Children benefit from interactions with adults that are tailored to their current skills and interests, and contribute to worthwhile outcomes. Meaningful support for learning and development is responsive to children's understanding and abilities in the context of desired goals. This approach to working with young children is succinctly captured in the idea of using **challenging and achievable** goals for children as represented in NAEYC's developmentally appropriate practice statement.[22]

Effective caregivers continually pay attention to children's interests and abilities. They make moment-to-moment decisions about how to adapt the environment and interactions to better support children's learning in an activity or interaction with a caregiver or peer. NAEYC's developmentally appropriate practice position statement emphasizes the importance of teachers having a solid repertoire of teaching strategies for responding to a range of child needs.[23]

Each ELM activity plan offers scaffolding tips that can help a caregiver provide extra support or increased challenge in an activity. Each activity plan also offers guidance on how to accommodate different ways a child may respond to an activity. These provisions are described in the Effective Use of ELM section of this *Guide* (see How to Use Activity Plans).

The curriculum includes efficient guides for observing a child's progress with foundation skills promoted by ELM. Each guide includes suggestions for follow-up plans that build on what a child knows and is able to do. Details are offered in the Effective Use of ELM section of this *Guide*. Also, suggestions of additional ways to promote children's learning and development are offered in the Areas Promoted by ELM section of this *Guide*.

Most ELM activity plans for infants and toddlers use **guided play** to support meaningful learning. In guided play, a child pursues his/her interests within a caregiver-supported context that reflects a program's goals for learning. A caregiver provides materials of interest to a child and gently offers comments or actions that can broaden or deepen a child's explorations.

Research indicates that guided play is more effective than free play in supporting goals for a child's learning. Experts view guided play as a middle ground between direct instruction and open-ended free play.[24] Guided play is a central part of the NAEYC developmentally appropriate practice statement, which recognizes the benefits of both self-directed play and guided play.[25]

At a more global level, ELM's focus on consequential skills for school and life success is likely to be viewed as meaningful among families and policy makers who want children to have the best possible start in life and view early childhood education as a smart investment in society's future. Strengthening the alignment between pre-kindergarten and elementary school experiences and goals is of keen interest to many constituencies, including NAEYC.[26]

Plentiful

ELM is plentiful in the amount and quality of sequenced attention given to early childhood skills that bolster success in school and life. In addition to providing support for developmental areas that matter the most in the early years of life, ELM

activity plans help young children actively focus on a particular skill or set of closely related skills.

Repetition is a proven way to support the development of skills. The sequence of attention to specific skills in the ELM Curriculum includes periodic repeated practice. For example, research shows that young children benefit from frequent practice of self-regulation skills.[27] In ELM activities for toddlers, there is regular support for skills in calming down after experiencing or observing a stimulating activity. The activities offer different types of stimulating experience, followed by opportunities to practice the same calming-down strategies introduced early in the curriculum.

More generally, caregivers are encouraged to repeat activities that are of interest to a child and, over time, add variations, changes, or small additions that increase the challenge of the activity. These strategies are highly regarded ways to sustain children's interest and participation. Practice with meaningful variations can also support children's progress toward more advanced and complex skills.

In addition to providing a comprehensive set of activity plans, ELM suggests additional ways to promote specific areas of development in the Areas Promoted by ELM section of this *Guide* (see Building on the Activity Plans in descriptions of each area promoted by ELM). Also, ELM provides parenting tips that can be used by families to support foundation skills promoted by ELM. This resource is called *Readiness Starts Early*. See Connecting with Families in the Effective Use of ELM section of this *Guide*.

ELM is plentiful with supports for classroom staff and trainers. A rich and efficient set of resources is summarized in the Ready-to-Go ELM Resources chart in this *Guide*.

Ready-to-Go ELM Resources

Classroom Supports
Comprehensive activity plans for each of three age groups
Printable classroom materials
Guide for Observing and Individualizing (8 guides for infants, 9 guides for toddlers)
Forms for planning and recording
ELM Snapshot of Child Progress (a form for infants, a form for toddlers)
ELM Planning Form: Week of _____
List of materials used in each set of activities
Staff Training Supports
User Guide
ELM Activity Observation Checklist
Online trainings (3 for direct care staff, 3 for trainers)
Family Engagement Supports
Readiness Starts Early tips for supporting children's learning in families
Examples of portfolio entries that describe a child's progress

ELM's Starting Points

The ELM Curriculum is the result of a five-year project initiated by the U.S. Department of War for the purpose of developing a comprehensive, evidence-informed curriculum and related training materials designed to bolster children's readiness for school. The project, known as the Curriculum Development Project for Early Care and Education, was conducted by Purdue University's Department of Human Development and Family Studies as part of the DoW-USDA Partnership for Military Families.[28]

In addition to specifying broad-based school readiness outcomes, DoW parameters for the curriculum included mixed-age classrooms for children 3–5 years of age; three age groupings for children from birth to 36 months of age; inclusion of developmentally appropriate practices; and guidance for adapting a classroom-based curriculum for family child care homes.

Four major factors contributed to the curriculum's development. Each is described below.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

The concept of developmentally appropriate practice is the dominant framework for best practice in programs of early care and education. The concept was developed by NAEYC in the mid-1980s[29] and subsequently revised in 1997,[30] 2009,[31] and 2020.[32] There are numerous references to the influence of the developmentally appropriate practice position statement and the program accreditation criteria of the NAEYC on ELM in this *Guide's* description of key characteristics of ELM.[33]

The ELM Curriculum developers adhered to the most recent statements on developmentally appropriate practice (2009 and 2020) and program accreditation criteria (2019).[34] The concept of developmentally appropriate practice is sometimes used by early childhood professionals as "a shorthand term for the value of play or letting children be children," but this interpretation does not fully represent the present-day concept of developmentally appropriate practice.[35]

The original position statement on developmentally appropriate practice emphasized child-initiated play. Research and program experiences led to a rethinking and refinement of this emphasis in the 1997 revision of the developmentally appropriate practice statement. The 1997 revision indicates that children "benefit from engaging in self-initiated, spontaneous play and from teacher-planned and -structured activities."[36] This principle continues to be central to the current version of the position statement.

Guidance from Research Evidence and Experts

An extensive review of outcome research published in scholarly refereed journals was conducted to answer two questions:

- What early childhood skills are linked to later positive outcomes, particularly indicators of school readiness?
- What early childhood classroom practices significantly support the development of early childhood skills linked to later positive outcomes for children?

Answers to the first question were used to identify foundation skills promoted in the curriculum. Answers to the second question informed decisions about teaching practices and other learning experiences offered in the curriculum.

The literature review represented more than 230 research reports plus an additional 115 background readings. The review found uneven amounts of attention to different ages and content areas in early childhood. More is known about how to promote positive outcomes in the preschool-age years than in years spanning birth to 36 months. Research on strategies to improve children's language and literacy development is more extensive than studies

of how to promote children's growth in other areas. Summaries of research that influenced the curriculum's development are provided in the Areas Promoted by ELM section of this *Guide*.

Recognized experts in the care and education of young children and a range of stakeholders within and outside of the DoW Child Development Program were consulted at the outset of the project about needed directions in early childhood curricula, including curriculum training resources. Experts and early childhood stakeholders also provided feedback on ways to support family engagement in children's learning. Consultations with DoW Child Development Program leaders continued throughout the project.

Leading early childhood specialists served as content experts in the development of the curriculum's five areas promoted for children birth–36 months and eight areas promoted for children 3–5 years of age. The content experts developed a sequenced plan for their respective area that specified practices for supporting the development of foundation skills over time. The sequenced plans for each area were used by curriculum specialists to develop detailed drafts of learning activity plans. The drafts of activity plans were reviewed by content experts, revised by curriculum specialists in response to feedback from content experts, and subjected to pilot testing as described below. Content experts also worked closely with curriculum specialists to revise activity plans in response to feedback from pilot sites. In addition, content experts contributed to the descriptions of areas promoted by ELM (see next major section of this *Guide*).

Pilot Testing

The structure and components of draft activity plans for infants and toddlers were piloted in 12 infant-toddler rooms (four in each age group; birth–12 months, 12–24 months, and 24–36 months) across four child development centers. The centers were located in four military installations. Caregivers used the draft plans for a period of eight weeks. ELM curriculum staff conducted a two-hour orientation training with the trainer(s) who supported the participating rooms. Trainers were advised to provide 2–3 hours of individualized training to staff of the participating rooms. Lead staff provided feedback on their uses of activity plan drafts in telephone consultations with ELM Curriculum staff twice a month. They also wrote notes on activity plan drafts. Training and Curriculum Specialists provided feedback in weekly telephone and/or email consultations with ELM Curriculum staff. Also, ELM Curriculum staff visited each pilot site at the end of pilot work to secure in-depth information. The feedback led to refinements of activity options offered in each activity plan, including guidance on the selection of activity options.

Staff Credentials and Turnovers

ELM's resources were influenced by prevalent national patterns of considerable variability in the education and longevity of early childhood program staff. Turnover rates are typically high in early childhood programs.[37]

More generally, it is important to acknowledge NAEYC's observation that many teachers lack the current knowledge and skills needed to provide high-quality learning experiences for young children, at least in some areas of a curriculum. In addition, NAEYC notes that even well-qualified teachers find it challenging to create from scratch a comprehensive curriculum that addresses all important standards, learning goals, and assessment procedures.[38]

Infant-toddler program experts point to a caregiver's deep knowledge of infant-toddler assessment and development as essential to successful implementation of a curriculum. Critical

expertise here includes child observation skills, evidence-based understanding of infant and toddler development, and skills in designing and responsively implementing key experiences that support growth and learning along a developmental continuum.[39]

These circumstances influenced the curriculum project's development of user-friendly resources that include models of high-quality implementation of activity plans. The provisions are described in the Effective Use of ELM section of this *Guide*.

Endnotes

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Communication/Language

Birth–36 Months

Beginning in infancy, language directed to a young child in an engaging way is essential for the optimal development of vocabulary knowledge.[1] Infants and toddlers who frequently hear and process rich language from their caregivers (receptive language) learn more language more quickly.

Using words to communicate (expressive language) occurs somewhat later than receptive language. But infants actively communicate in many other ways from birth by using coos, babbles, smiles, cries, and other sounds. Responsive caregivers acknowledge these early forms of communication by mimicking in an exaggerated manner through larger-than-life facial expressions, a raised pitch of voice, or other positive utterances during natural silences left by the infant. This type of back-and-forth communication fosters early skills in serve-and-return exchanges, described in the Introduction to the ELM Curriculum section of this *Guide*. By about five or six months of age, infants can show awareness of being a partner in a back-and-forth interaction. Language is as much a social skill as a cognitive skill.[2]

Back-and-forth communications with a young child are linked to early brain development.

A growing line of research indicates that in the early months of life, well before word learning, infants acquire information about the phonetic characteristics of their home language by listening to adults speak. It is common for parents and other caregivers to speak to their infants with more pronounced vowels—a "stretching" of vowel space—than when speaking to adults. This type of talk is often called "parentese" (or "motherese"). The approach provides infants with well-specified information about linguistic units that provide a building block for words.[3]

Foundation Skills

- Receptive language
- Expressive language
- Awareness of print and pictures
- Awareness of differences in sounds

Infants between six and nine months of age begin to organize the speech sounds they hear into broad categories, and toward 12 months of age may enjoy imitating different speech sounds, such as a sound made by an animal. Infants often recognize words for common items, such as cup or doll, between 12 and 24 months and also put two words together, such as "more milk." Children understand differences in the meaning of key words, such as "go" and "stop," between 24 and 36 months, and are likely to have words for almost everything.[4]

NAEYC Accreditation. The NAEYC curriculum standard[5] expects program staff to engage in one-on-one play that promotes children's verbal and nonverbal communication using simple rhymes, interactive and/or routine games, and songs or games involving sequences of gestures. Additionally, program staff are expected to help children connect print and pictures to real things in the environment and connect print to a spoken word through shared book reading with picture, wordless, and rhyming books.

Link to VLS. The course on communication and language development offered in the Virtual Lab School's infant and toddler track[6] describes how interpersonal relationships promote communication skills (Lesson 1) and offers typical communication and language milestones (Lesson 2). The VLS course also describes examples of ways to promote communication and language skills (Lesson 4).

How ELM Promotes Communication and Language Development

The ELM Curriculum supports receptive and expressive language skills plus awareness of print and pictures with activity plans entitled Exploring Words. The Exploring Sounds title is used for activities that promote awareness of differences in sounds.

Exploring Words

Book sharing is used extensively in the ELM Curriculum to promote young children's communication and language skills. During infancy, activity plans offer options for looking at a book's pictures that a caregiver describes in his/her words while pointing. This approach reflects studies that show benefits of listening to adults speak, especially talk that is rich in word use. Activity plans include an option of helping an infant contribute to managing the book, such as turning pages and holding the book. Some books support social interactions as part of a story, such as a *Peekaboo* game.[7]

Book-sharing activities with toddlers emphasize opportunities to communicate about pictures and a story and point to items in pictures that a caregiver names. Some books encourage toddlers to use clues, mostly found in pictures, to make predictions about a character or theme in the story. Book-sharing plans for toddlers often include a follow-up option that involves **active manipulation of materials related to a book**, such as using puppets to act out a story about five little ducks.[8]

Activity plans consistently suggest caregivers **repeat and expand a child's utterance during book sharing and recognize nonverbal communications**, such as sustained looking at a book illustration or kicking of legs in response to a picture or caregiver's comments. Expanding on a child's utterance may involve a caregiver adding one word so the child hears his/her comment as part of a two-word statement.

Different types of books are used across all infant-toddler age groups, including wordless (picture) books, books with textured pages, and rhyming books. Activity descriptions encourage caregivers to emphasize rhyming words and repetitive phrases, and **to invite toddlers to say key words ("good night") or repetitive phrases ("no more monkeys")**. Some activity plans support toddlers in saying a missing rhyming word. Wordless books shared with toddlers usually invite a child to help tell a story based on pictures. In addition to promoting language use, encouraging young children to repeat words or phrases or help construct a story are good ways to support a child's participation in the activity and attention to what is happening in a book. For example, asking toddlers "What does the doctor say?" reinforces understanding of the story.

A range of book topics is offered, including bedtime routines, babies' faces, young children and their parents, farm animals, and parts of our bodies. Activity plans consistently encourage caregivers to **connect book information to familiar items and experiences** in children's classroom and home environments. An activity plan for older toddlers (24–36 months) involves looking at and talking about symbols in the room, such as pictures that show where specific toys are stored, pictures in the room's posted daily schedule, and exit signs.[9]

Caregivers also are encouraged to **point to book text while reading** a book with toddlers. The intent is to support children's awareness of (a) print on a book page, (b) print can be spoken, and (c) print is different than pictures. Children's letter and word recognition is not a goal at this age.

Nursery rhymes, simple finger plays, and songs are offered as interactive experiences in activity plans. Activity plans for older toddlers include singing and acting out "Row, Row, Row Your Boat,"[10] for example.

Use of books, rhymes, and songs is not limited to the Communication/Language area. Books are featured in activity plans that directly support foundation skills in other areas promoted by ELM. The books often introduce or reinforce important concepts, such as names and characteristics of different types of clothing,[11] and/or facilitate interactions between caregiver and child, such as dollhouse play as a follow-up to a book about bedtime.[12]

Nearly all activity plans also promote language use. Examples specific to the activity are often offered. Similarly, rich language is central to caregivers' use of nearly all ELM activities.

Exploring Sounds

ELM activity plans for infants and toddlers support awareness of differences in sounds as a basis for exploring early phonological awareness skills during preschool years. Activities focused on sounds are offered for each age group and across ELM's 50-week period. For infants, sound-related activities generally involve **nursery rhymes**, sometimes with hand movements for older infants. For younger toddlers (12–24 months), activities feature different **sounds of farm and zoo animals**. For older toddlers, there is attention to rain sounds, unusual word sounds, and to **louder and quieter sounds**.

Building on the Activity Plans

More Practices for Promoting Communication and Language

- Each week select about 20 books for infants and toddlers to enjoy. Rotate some books while retaining favorites. Include books that represent all children. Books can be arranged in play areas and on displays that children can reach. Put books in an orderly and inviting arrangement. Baskets of books on the floor are easily accessible for mobile and early-mobile infants. In addition to one-to-one book sharings offered in ELM activity plans, regularly look at and talk about one or more books of interest with individuals and small gatherings of children. It is fine if a child loses interest in a book before you complete it.
- In selecting books for young children, keep in mind that generally a book with one bold image per page is appropriate for young infants. Older infants and toddlers can enjoy looking at pictures with more detail, especially when guided by an attentive caregiver.
- During diapering and mealtimes, use simple sentences to describe your actions and the actions and reactions of the infant or toddler who is the focus of your efforts. Remember that a child's actions and reactions may be nonverbal. Narrate actions as they are happening. Smile and maintain eye contact, as tasks permit. Repeat and expand on a child's utterances, including an infant's babbling. Look for opportunities to initiate or sustain a serve-and-return exchange.

- Describe sounds that occur randomly in your room, especially a sound that draws a child's attention. Point to your ear when you say that you heard a sound. Point to where the sound came from when you describe it.
- Name the food items a child is eating or is offered during a snack or mealtime. Point to each item as you name it. Invite a toddler to say the name of a food item you point to.
- Name dishes and utensils used during a mealtime, snack, or playtime. Point to each item as you name it.
- Enthusiastically acknowledge a child's early efforts to say two words together, such as "more milk." Two-word utterances are an important step in language use.
- Imitate sounds made by an infant or single words offered by a toddler. Remember your corresponding facial expression is part of your communication. Acknowledge the child's response to your communication. Support a serve-and-return exchange if it emerges.
- Add words to a child's nonverbal request. If a child points to a cracker, for example, ask "Do you want a cracker?" Or suggest words the child could use, depending on the child's language skills.
- Ask parents or primary caregivers, one at a time, about their child's interests that could be pursued with books in your room.

Strengthening Your Understanding of Communication and Language

Here are some suggestions for reflecting on the curriculum's recommended practices for supporting children's communication and language skills.

- Watch a short video on how serve-and-return interactions help build a young child's brain architecture. The video was developed by the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University. The title of the video is "Serve and Return Shapes Brain Circuitry."
- Audio record your talk during a book sharing or mealtime or play period with a child. When you listen to the recording, make a mental or actual list of things you said or did that can contribute to a child's communication and language development. Also reflect on ways you might have managed the talk differently.
- Five of the 10 strategies for promoting responsive interactions with a young child recommended in the Introduction to the ELM Curriculum section of this *Guide* directly support a child's communication and language skills: acknowledge, encourage, question, serve and return, and pause. Reflect on how use of these practices might be helpful to specific children in your care. Also, take stock of your use of these practices. Are there strategies that need more intentional use?
- For one day, notice how children in your care respond to pauses in your talk. A pause leaves a space for a child to have a communication turn. Does a child look at you or look away, change his/her facial expression, move part of his/her body, offer an utterance? How do pauses in your talk contribute to interactions with individual children?
- Select an activity plan that supports one of the four other areas promoted by ELM (cognitive, self-regulation, social-emotional, physical/health). In what ways might the plan also support a child's communication and language skills?

Endnotes

1 Fernald, A., & Weisleder, A. (2011). Early language experience is vital to developing fluency in understanding. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research*, *Vol. 3* (pp. 3–19). New York: Guilford Press.
2 Fogel, A. (2015). *Infant development: A topical approach, 2nd ed.* Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY: Sloan Publishing.
3 Kuhl, P. K., Andruski, J. E., Chistovich, I. A., Chistovich, L. A., Kozhevnikova, E. V., Ryskina, V. L.,…Lacerda, F. (1997). Cross-language analysis of phonetic units in language addressed to infants. *Science*, *277*, 684–686.; Thiessen, E. D., Hill, E. A., & Saffran, J. R. (2005). Infant-directed speech facilitates word segmentation. *Infancy*, *7*, 53–71.
4 Gonzalez-Mena, J., & Eyer, D. W. (2012). *Infants, toddlers and caregivers*, *9th ed.* New York: McGraw-Hill.
5 National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019). *NAEYC early learning program accreditation standards and assessment items*. Washington, DC: Author.
6 www.virtuallabschool.org/infant-toddler/comm-lang-development
7 ELM Curriculum's Block 2, Communication/Language, Options 1–3 for Birth–12 months.
8 ELM Curriculum's Block 16, Communication/Language, Options 2–3 for 24–36 months.
9 ELM Curriculum's Block 12, Communication/Language, Option 1 for 24–36 months.
10 ELM Curriculum's Block 19, Communication/Language, Options 2–3 for 24–36 months.
11 ELM Curriculum's Block 9, Cognitive, Option 1 for 12–24 months.
12 ELM Curriculum's Block 4, Social-Emotional, Option 1 for 12–24 months.

Cognitive

Birth–36 Months

Human beings are born with no knowledge of themselves or their environments. Yet the process of knowing begins early in life primarily through infants' use of their senses, especially sucking or mouthing, reaching, and grasping.

Within several months an infant can refine, repeat, and combine basic information-gathering actions, such as reaching, grasping, and mouthing. By about three months of age infants can recognize simple connections between behavior and its effects.[1] Between 4–8 months of age infants are likely to engage in repeated activity, such as swiping at a mobile to make it move, and between 8–12 months there are indications of intentionality in an infant's actions, such as pulling a string to bring a toy closer.[2]

Cognitive development is directly linked to all other areas of development.

An awareness of cause and effect continues to develop during the period of 12–24 months, partly through active trial-and-error actions aimed at discovering new ways to do things. Children at this age also begin to develop broad categories of things, such as "animals," a skill that is a valuable building block for sorting and matching objects. Between 24–36 months, children begin to use words to describe actions and objects. Make-believe play can become more complex and creative.[3]

The above examples of cognitive growth from birth to age three years point to the contributions of very young children's actions and thinking as foundations of later and more complex processes of knowing in science, mathematics, and social studies. Cognitive development is directly connected to all other areas of development, especially communication/language, motor skills, and self-regulation.

Foundation Skills

- Object inquiry
- Problem-solving

NAEYC Accreditation. The NAEYC curriculum standard[4] recommends infants, toddlers, and twos have a variety of opportunities to explore and manipulate age-appropriate materials of different shapes, sizes, colors, and patterns to promote early mathematics and creative expression. NAEYC accreditation standards also recommend that infants, toddlers, and twos have experiences to use their senses to discover how to make things happen and how to solve simple problems. These skills are a basis of early science knowledge.

Link to VLS. The Virtual Lab School's course on cognitive development in the infant and toddler track[5] describes and defines cognitive development (Lesson 1), offers cognitive development milestones (Lesson 2), and describes how interpersonal relationships and interactions support cognitive development (Lesson 3). The course on cognitive development also describes how learning materials and environments support young children's explorations and problem-solving (Lesson 4) and offers ideas for using developmentally appropriate and responsive practices related to cognitive development (Lesson 5).

How ELM Promotes Cognitive Development

Activity plans entitled Exploring Objects promote object inquiry skills, including (1) different ways to explore an object(s) and notice one or more important characteristics, (2) awareness of cause-and-effect manipulations of an object, and (3) spatial awareness in moving an object(s) from one place to

another. Activity plans entitled Solving Problems support early choice making, the development of object permanence, and skills in taking apart and putting together different types of toys. Activity plans focused on Sorting and Matching are designed mostly for older toddlers (24–36 months) and extend the attention to object characteristics emphasized in Exploring Objects activities for older infants (9–12 months) and younger toddlers (12–24 months).

Exploring Objects

Many activity plans are guided-play experiences that encourage infants and toddlers to **use one or more senses to explore objects**. There are planned opportunities for infants to touch (or splash) water on a tray and play with floating balls in water, for example. For young toddlers, there are opportunities to hold water in their hands, fill and empty bottles with water, put a foot in a puddle of water, and use scoops and pails with dry material. Building with blocks is offered in several activity options for older toddlers. Some activities promote **learning by looking**, such as a caregiver-guided tour of objects in the room and outdoors.

ELM activities that promote object inquiry skills often provide **similar objects that differ in one important way**, such as hard/soft and big/little. An activity for infants, for example, involves items of high contrast in color,[6] and an activity for young toddlers involves manipulating dry and wet sand with hands or tools.[7] Using similar objects that differ in one important characteristic, such as balls of the same color but two different sizes, helps young children focus on an aspect of the item and not the item more broadly. Focusing on characteristics of objects is also emphasized in Self-Regulation activities that promote concentration.

Support for awareness of **cause and effect** is offered mostly in activities for infants. One of the

first activities offered for infants suggests inviting an infant to touch a mobile during a guided tour of objects in the room.[8] A water mat (see picture), sound-making toys, especially bells and rattles, and pop-up toys are among the objects used in activities focused on cause and effect. Young children's awareness of how a motor action with an object can lead to an effect also is supported in some Physical/Health activities that use sound-making objects to support hand movements.

Spatial awareness in moving an object from one place to another is supported in activities primarily for toddlers. Younger toddlers are invited to put items in a cart that they push to another part of the room,[9] for example, and an activity for older toddlers involves carrying a ball between two baskets placed on opposite sides of an activity area, and putting and retrieving the ball in each basket.[10]

Activity plans encourage caregivers to emphasize language learning during activities. For example, activity descriptions suggest that caregivers draw attention to action words, such as push and shake, while the action is happening, and also location words, such as in and out. Names of familiar items used in an activity also are emphasized in plan descriptions.

Solving Problems

Making choices is an important life skill that is emphasized in ELM's activity plans for infants with opportunities to choose one of two appealing toy possibilities. Choice is also a factor in several Physical/Health activities for infants in which a second toy is offered while the infant is manipulating another toy.[11] The cognitive problem for an infant to consider is how to keep the first toy while holding or playing with a second toy.

Object permanence—understanding that an object or person exists even when not seen—is an important developmental milestone promoted in activities designed mostly for infants and young toddlers. Activities for infants emphasize visually tracking an item moved by a caregiver and looking for an item that is temporarily hidden. Activities for young toddlers emphasize figuring out what a book character can see and using clues to anticipate what animal will be seen on the next page of a peekaboo book. Several activities pose the problem of how to move around a barrier to get a toy. Skills in remembering where a hidden object is located are emphasized in Self-Regulation games that promote executive function.

Problem-solving skills are also promoted in activities that involve **taking apart and putting together toys**. These activities are primarily for younger and older toddlers. The toys differ in level of challenge, from a simple stacking ring to star builders.

Sorting and Matching

Activities that promote sorting and matching skills, aimed at mostly older toddlers, emphasize how two or three objects are the same and different. This set of activities begins with opportunities for younger toddlers to find toys that are the same and different, and then offers older toddlers opportunities to compare characteristics of the same type of toy. Sorting or matching toys by their characteristics is an extension of previously described activities that encourage children to notice object characteristics (see Exploring Objects).

Building on the Activity Plans

More Practices for Promoting Cognitive Development

- Play *Peekaboo* with a diaper or cloth during diapering.
- During a playtime, encourage a child to watch you slowly move an appealing object in the space around you, then behind your back or out of sight, and again in full view of the child. Comment on the child's reaction when the object reappears. Hold the object so it is easy for the child to see (not partially hidden in your hand).
- Put several inches of warm water in a tub or sensory table with no-tears shampoo to create bubbles. Offer a toddler a choice of 2–3 items to explore in the water. Possibilities include small nonbreakable containers for scooping water, small toy vehicles, and people or animal figures. Describe the toddler's actions.
- Walk with 1–2 toddlers around the perimeter of the playground. Describe what toddlers seem to be looking at inside and outside the yard. One toddler may notice trucks going by while another toddler may find an insect to observe. Promote spatial relations skills by drawing attention to items that are close and items that are distant.
- Offer meaningful choice-making experiences during the day, such as dressing after a nap ("Do you want to wear your green shirt or your fire truck shirt?"). Speak clearly and point to each item as you describe or name it. For one-to-one

book sharing, offer two books and invite the child to select one for you to read.

- Draw attention to choices that infants and toddlers make during their play ("You decided to get the toy cow.").
- Vision is not fully developed at birth. Eye coordination and perception of color take time and experience to develop. For younger infants especially, place a single image on a wall rather than a collage or collection of images. Clear, bold, and contrasting colors are easier for an infant to see than light colors. Rotate the pictures or images.
- Provide novel and appealing arrangements of playthings for infants and toddlers to view and touch. Remember that infants need plenty of time to look at new objects. Some infants may experience overstimulation in a cluttered or brightly colored environment.
- Fold gift-wrapping tissue around a toy as an infant or younger toddler watches. Encourage the child to find the toy.
- Provide toddler-size cleaning tools, such as a handheld broom and dust pan, plus a dry sensory item, such as sand. Encourage toddlers to use the items during sensory play. Demonstrate use of a tool if a toddler seems unfamiliar with its intended use.
- Notice and support transitions in a toddler's play with blocks. Younger toddlers (12–24 months) tend to build towers. Older toddlers (24–36 months) often engage in more constructive play that may involve a pretend theme, such as family life or making simple houses (usually without a roof) or roads for cars.

Strengthening Your Understanding of Cognitive Development

Below are some ideas for reflecting on and increasing your knowledge of cognitive growth during the first three years of life.

- The NAEYC accreditation standards appropriately link early cognitive growth to later skills in mathematics, creative expression, and science. What are your ideas about how infants' and toddlers' active explorations of objects can contribute over time to skills in mathematics, creative expression, and science?
- Select several cognitive activities in the ELM Curriculum and reflect on how the activity also involves gross and/or fine motor skills and self-regulation skills, especially concentration and short-term memory.
- Sometimes toddlers select puzzles that are too advanced for their current cognitive or motor skills. What are your ideas about different ways a caregiver could respond to this situation? How might a possible response be a helpful learning experience for a toddler that also supports the toddler's choice-making?
- Why does "the more, the better" concept not necessarily apply to materials made available to infants and toddlers for free play?
- In what ways do you see children in your room engaged in learning by looking?

Endnotes

1 Fogel, A. (2015). *Infant development: A topical approach*, *2nd ed*. Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY: Sloan Publishing.
2 Gonzalez-Mena, J., & Eyer, D. W. (2012). *Infants, toddlers and caregivers*, *9th ed*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
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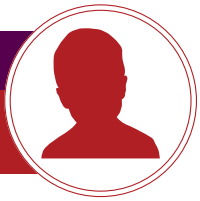
4 National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019). *NAEYC early learning program accreditation standards and assessment items*. Washington, DC: Author.
5 www.virtuallabschool.org/infant-toddler/cognitive
6 ELM Curriculum's Block 18, Cognitive, Options 1–3 for Birth–12 months.
7 ELM Curriculum's Block 1 Cognitive, Options 1–3 for 12–24 months.
8 ELM Curriculum's Block 1, Cognitive, Option 1 for Birth–12 months.
9 ELM Curriculum's Block 13, Cognitive, Options 1–2 for 12–24 months.
10 ELM Curriculum's Block 6, Cognitive, Option 1 for 24–36 months.
11 ELM Curriculum's Block 10, Physical/Health, Option 1 for Birth–12 months; ELM Curriculum's Block 20, Physical/Health, Option 1 for Birth–12 months.

Self-Regulation

Birth–36 Months



Self-regulation is the ability to manage behaviors, emotions, and thoughts. Young children's self-regulation skills are linked to a wide range of later positive outcomes, including academic skills.[1] Children who are able to pay attention, follow instructions, stay focused on a task, and control impulses, for example, demonstrate stronger academic skills than children who have not developed these regulatory skills. Their academic gains include early mathematics and literacy.[2]

The development of self-regulation skills is a slow process that begins in infancy and continues through early adulthood.[3] Three-month-olds who suck on their fist to soothe themselves are engaging in an early form of self-regulation. Toddlers who restrain from throwing themselves on the floor in a temper tantrum are managing both their behaviors and emotions.[4]

Over time, responsibility for regulation gradually shifts from caregivers to the child.

In the first years of life, many aspects of regulation are caregivers' responsibilities. Caregivers provide important forms of regulation when they soothe an infant's crying through feeding, a diaper change, or providing comfort through rocking or similar actions. Infants develop a sense of trust in caregivers who consistently respond quickly and appropriately to cries and other bids for attention. Eventually the child learns to regulate his/her own behaviors and emotions.[5] Caregivers who actively help an infant calm down after a stimulating experience, for example, help the infant develop an ability to transition from an active to restful state. Over time, responsibility for regulation gradually shifts from caregivers to the child as the child develops the ability to manage behaviors, emotions, and thoughts.

Foundation Skills

- Self-control
- Concentration
- Executive function

Training in aspects of self-regulation is increasingly offered in elementary schools and in adult settings. Mindfulness, which includes the ability to focus on the present moment, is closely aligned with self-regulation skills. At the adult level, for example, the U.S. Army, the British Royal Navy, and the Royal New Zealand Air Force are among a handful of military services worldwide offering mindfulness training to some troops. Mindfulness, which includes the ability to focus on the present moment, is closely aligned with self-regulation skills. The goal of the training was to improve a service member's focus and reduce attention to distractions during complex procedures, often conducted in chaotic circumstances.[6] Research points to the effectiveness of mindfulness training on members of a special operations unit.[7]

ELM Curriculum activities for infants and toddlers support the earliest dimensions of self-regulation, particularly self-control, concentration, and executive function. Executive function includes paying attention and flexibly shifting focus, holding onto and using information, and inhibiting natural thoughts and responses that are inappropriate to the situation. ELM activities offer simple building blocks toward these complex skills that are further supported in ELM's activities for children 3–5 years of age.

Self-regulation is a well-focused and evidence-based set of skills that overlap in some ways with a broader framework known as approaches to learning. The approaches to learning concept is a targeted outcome of Head Start,[8] among other

early childhood programs. It is an umbrella term found most frequently in the literature on preschool children's school readiness. Persistence and executive functioning are among the aspects of approaches to learning that pertain to infants and toddlers.[9]

NAEYC Accreditation. The NAEYC relationships standard[10] recognizes the importance of promoting children's self-regulation. Program staff are recommended to provide opportunities to actively teach toddlers emotion regulation skills as well as guide and support children gaining control of physical impulses.

Link to VLS. The Virtual Lab School's course on positive guidance[11] includes attention to the importance of guidance in developing infants' and toddlers' self-regulation (Lesson 1), ways to respond to challenging behaviors (Lesson 2), and ways the environment can support the development of self-regulation and prevent challenging behaviors (Lesson 3).

How ELM Promotes Self-Regulation

ELM activities entitled Getting Calm are designed to support beginning aspects of self-control. Activities with a Paying Attention title pertain to early concentration skills. Activities entitled Focusing and Remembering support short-term memory, which is an important part of executive function, and persistence.

Many self-regulation activity plans aimed at younger and older toddlers offer a laddered approach to the 2–3 options within a plan. The first option capitalizes on proven benefits of learning by observing. Subsequent options involve guided practice and, in some plans, independent practice. Caregivers are encouraged to introduce an activity with an option that most appropriately accommodates a child(ren)'s abilities and interests.

Getting Calm

Each of the infant and younger toddler (12–24 months) activities focused on **self-control** begins with an appropriately stimulating experience. For an infant, the activity commonly involves a caregiver singing a song with gentle movements or saying a rhyme with finger actions, such as "Itsy Bitsy Spider." The stimulating experience for an older toddler generally involves a caregiver offering a more complex song and actions, such as "Open Shut Them" and "I'm a Little Teapot." Some mildly stimulating experiences use sound-making toys. ELM activity descriptions encourage caregivers to carefully monitor each child's response to the activity and make prompt adjustments if the experiences appears to be overstimulating.

A stimulating experience is the first segment of an activity. The second segment offers age-appropriate strategies for calming down. The "getting calm" supports for infants, for example, include physical comfort and a caregiver speaking in a soft voice and quietly singing a familiar song.

The self-control activities for older toddlers (24–36 months) are more advanced. There are deep, slow breathing exercises aimed at helping children calm their minds and bodies. There also are opportunities to pretend to be a cornstalk or tree swaying in the wind. The upper body moves while feet are to remain still, like roots in the soil. In addition, several activities invite older toddlers to do simple yoga poses. Yoga is an established mindfulness approach offered frequently in ELM's self-regulation activities for children 3–5 years of age.

The options within self-control activity plans for infants typically differ in type of stimulation offered during the first segment. Motor skills may

be a factor for caregivers to consider in deciding which option to offer to a child. For example, each option in one activity plan uses a different type of sound-making toy.[12] A caregiver's selection of an option would need to consider an infant's skills for manipulating a toy as well as toy interests.

Paying Attention

Activity plans for infants promote early **concentration** skills by inviting an infant to watch an object, such as a puppet or toy fish, manipulated by a caregiver, and to manipulate the object. This sometimes occurs as part of a rhyme. Support for infants' concentration skills also includes opportunities to concentrate on novel sounds and facial expressions made by a caregiver, and clapping actions.

Toddlers' concentration skills are promoted with activities that encourage attention to characteristics of two objects that are the same or different. This approach builds on cognitive inquiry activities by helping a toddler pay attention to specific characteristics of objects. There also are activities that offer **go and stop requests** involving manipulation of an object, such as a toy frog that hops and then stops hopping. Motor action requests of older toddlers are often embedded in a song or rhyme. A song or rhyme adds a level of challenge generally not offered in concentration activities for younger toddlers.

Focusing and Remembering

ELM's self-regulation activities for infants and toddlers support early development of components of **executive function**. These include paying attention and flexibly shifting focus, remembering

the location of a hidden object or an action associated with a specific cue, and persisting in an exploration or activity as a way of inhibiting attention to some unhelpful thought or distraction.

Most activities begin with an invitation to pay attention to an object being manipulated by a caregiver that is then hidden while the child watches. A child is invited to find the object. These activities support the cognitive skill of object permanence. There also are activities to help children **persist** in a slightly challenging activity. Persistence with a task is one way to inhibit unhelpful responses to a situation, such as quitting an activity. Different types of age-appropriate materials are used in the activities, including appealing toys for infants and puzzles for toddlers. There also are activities for toddlers that involve stopping body movements ("freezing") in response to a cue from music. These activities provide practice in focusing on a requested action and remembering what to do when a different request (cue) is offered.

Building on the Activity Plans

More Practices for Promoting Self-Regulation

- Use calming strategies any time an infant or toddler seems distressed and in need of help in regulating his/her emotions or behaviors.
- Enthusiastically recognize a child's concentration efforts during free play or a care routine. Example: "You are looking carefully with your eyes!"
- Acknowledge and encourage persistence during free play, such as an infant stretching to reach for a desired toy while on his/her tummy.
- Support persistence during self-help tasks, such as a toddler removing a jacket, pulling pants or shorts to waist, or putting on a sock.
- Playfully engage a toddler in an imitation game to get ready for an activity. One possibility is to encourage a toddler to do one or more actions, such as tap head with fingers, clap hands, raise and lower chin, and place hands on knees.
- Children benefit from clear signals that indicate an activity is ending soon or is over. Offer both verbal and nonverbal cues when a transition is about to occur.

Strengthening Your Understanding of Self-Regulation

Below are some ideas for reflecting on and increasing your knowledge of children's self-regulation skills.

- Caregivers are largely responsible for helping infants and toddlers regulate their emotions, behaviors, and thoughts. Over time, this responsibility can be shared with a child who is making progress in managing feelings, behaviors, and thoughts. Think about children you have cared for during the past 9–12 months. What have you noticed with individual children regarding small yet noticeable changes in ability to self-regulate?
- What are your ideas about why self-regulation skills take time and practice to develop? What times or situations in your room are particularly challenging for regulating emotions or behaviors?
- Support for self-regulation can be helpful at all stages of life. Consider the training of military troops in ways to increase focus and avoid paying attention to distractions when conducting complex procedures, described earlier in this section. What resources help you regulate your own emotions and thoughts during your work with young children?
- Select an activity plan in one of the four other areas promoted by ELM for infants and toddlers. In what ways might the activity options support the development of self-regulation skills?

Endnotes

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Social-Emotional

Birth–36 Months

Social-emotional competencies are increasingly recognized as a significant contributor to success in school and life.[1] The research evidence is particularly strong for consequences of preschool-age social-emotional skills. Studies show, for example, that children with strong social-emotional skills in the preschool years demonstrate on average stronger abilities in reading and mathematics in first grade than preschool-age children with weaker social-emotional skills.[2] The quality of experiences during the infant-toddler years set the stage for later development of social-emotional skills.[3]

Experiences during the infant-toddler years set the stage for later development of social-emotional skills.

Social-emotional development involves two sets of related skills. The social part of social-emotional competence includes basic skills in relating with familiar adults. For infants and toddlers, these skills include responding appropriately to a trusted adult's positive tone of voice, initiating and maintaining interaction with a familiar adult, and participating appropriately in established social routines, such as mealtime, diapering/toileting, nap time.[4] Early social skills in relating to peers include awareness of a peer's actions and, during toddlerhood, seeking out a peer and participating in simple interactive group activities. Sharing a toy with a peer may occur at about 36 months of age, but a 24-month-old child will likely hoard toys.[5]

The emotion part of social-emotional competence begins with newborns. Newborns do not differentiate self from the rest of the world. By three months infants generally show self-awareness, such as realizing their hands and feet are their own. Infants at about six months show a wide range of feelings, and by nine months are likely to show clear preferences by rejecting things that are not of interest. Toddlers typically are proud of their accomplishments, such as self-help skills, and may be easily overwhelmed by fatigue or distress.[6]

Foundation Skills

- Social interaction skills
- Awareness of emotions

The quality of attachment relationships with adult caregivers provides a secure base for infants and toddlers to explore and learn about their worlds. Studies indicate that an early secure attachment relationship is generally linked to later positive outcomes, including adjustment to school and success academically and socially.[7] The importance of responsive interactions between trusted adult and infant/toddler described earlier in this *Guide* are highly pertinent to supporting positive social-emotional development. Serve-and-return exchanges help build neural connections in a child's brain that in turn facilitate positive growth in social and communication skills.[8]

NAEYC Accreditation. The NAEYC relationships and curriculum standards[9] recommend promoting social-emotional development through talking, cooing, singing, and repeating infants' sounds as well as facilitating infants' interest in looking at, touching, or vocalizing to other people. Program staff are expected to be attentive and responsive to children's levels of arousal, various cries, and other signs of distress, and to help children become aware of different feelings.

Link to VLS. The Virtual Lab School's course on the social-emotional development of infants and toddlers[10] describes the importance of this domain for children's learning (Lesson 1) and offers social-emotional development milestones (Lesson 2). The course also describes how adults (Lesson 2), high-quality environments (Lesson 3), and experiences and activities (Lesson 4) can promote social-emotional development.

How ELM Promotes Social-Emotional Development

Activities designed to promote social interaction skills are titled Interacting with Others. Most suggested experiences occur in the context of free play or guided play. Activities focused on emotion awareness are titled Exploring Feelings and are mostly for toddlers. The importance of caregivers establishing and maintaining a secure relationship with each child in his/her care is not limited to activities, of course, and pertains to all areas promoted by ELM.

Interacting with Others

ELM activities promote **social interaction skills** primarily through play-based exchanges with a caregiver. Back-and-forth exchanges between caregiver and child are encouraged in nearly all activities. This type of exchange is also known as serve-and-return interactions. Different types of materials are used across activities to support interactions, such as rattles and nesting cups with infants and blocks and balls with toddlers. Activities also use facial expressions, books, and songs with movements to facilitate verbal and nonverbal interactions.

Caregivers are encouraged to follow a child's lead with an object or action, and to acknowledge a child's utterance, gesture, pointing, or facial expression. The activities are based on the idea that, over time, repeated experiences in responsive interactions with a caregiver will build a child's confidence and abilities in initiating and sustaining the attention of an adult.

Social interaction skills with peers are more challenging to foster at a very young age, partly because a young child may not reliably respond in a helpful way to another child's bid for attention. Sharing toys, for example, does not come naturally or easily to most toddlers. Still, focused experiences in social interactions with a peer are a focus of ELM activities.

Attention to and involvement of peers is sequenced across the three age groups. Five activity plans for infants directly pertain to social interactions with peers. There are suggestions for drawing an infant's attention to other infants in the room, and several plans for engaging two infants in parallel play. Most of the activity plans for toddlers that directly focus on social interactions with peers provide guidance for open-ended parallel play. Some activity plans for older toddlers (24–36 months) offer opportunities to share materials and engage in cooperative actions with a toy, such as a ball or a puzzle. There is no expectation in activity plans that toddlers will necessarily participate in ongoing back-and-forth exchanges with a peer. The skills involved in this more-advanced form of peer social interaction are promoted in ELM activities for preschool-age children.

Exploring Feelings

The ELM Curriculum offers activities designed to foster toddlers' **awareness of basic emotions**, particularly happy and sad. This goal is pursued mostly with book sharings. Attention is given to emotion words and to situations associated with feeling happy or sad or upset. Activities encourage toddlers to look closely at and imitate facial expressions that often communicate a particular feeling. The goal of several activities is to help toddlers understand how the ways we try to calm down after a stimulating experience (see section on Self-Regulation) can also be used to calm down when we feel upset about something. An overall intent of activity plans focused on emotion awareness is that familiarity with the concept of emotions will help toddlers get in tune with their own feelings and explore a wider range of emotions as part of ELM's activities for preschool-age children.

Building on the Activity Plans

More Practices for Promoting Social-Emotional Development

- Responding promptly and sensitively to a child's signals of distress fosters the child's trust and confidence in the relationship with the caregiver.
- During diapering and feeding, give an infant time to look at your face.[11] Infants are attracted to faces, and by 6–9 months of age will likely show strong preference for a trusted caregiver's face and signs of distress in response to a stranger's face.
- Support an infant's self-awareness by naming body parts he/she is looking at or using during diapering and feeding.
- Remember to routinely include a child's name in communications with the child. Example: "Hey, Caydon! It's time to change your diaper."
- Say the name of a feeling a child is clearly expressing. Example: "I think you are upset about something, Greta." Describe a child's nonverbal message. Example: "You are shaking your head 'no.' You are telling me you do not want applesauce."
- Prevent toddler disputes about toys by providing duplicates of favorite materials or clear procedures for how to share toys.
- Enthusiastically acknowledge a child's progress with a self-help skill.
- Comment on a child watching another child's actions or playing alongside a peer during free play. Example: "Jaden, you're watching Lisa play with a rattle."

Strengthening Your Understanding of Social-Emotional Development

- What are your ideas about why children with strong social-emotional skills in the early years of life tend to have positive transitions to kindergarten and stronger abilities in reading and mathematics in first grade than children with weaker social-emotional skills in the early years?
- ELM activities encourage play-based interactions between a caregiver and young child to foster a child's social interaction skills. One of the goals is to help a child learn how to initiate and maintain interaction with a familiar adult. What are your experiences in promoting this skill with infants and toddlers in your care?
- Reflect on the list of "More Ways for Promoting Social-Emotional Development" in relation to current practices in your room. Are there suggestions you would like to use or enhance in your setting? What other practices would you add to this list?
- Select an ELM activity plan from one of the other four areas promoted by ELM during the infant/toddler years. In what ways might the activity options support a child's social or emotional learning?

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Physical/Health

Birth–36 Months

Infants and toddlers spend a vast majority of their waking hours engaged in motor actions. More milestones in motor development occur during the first two years of life than during any other developmental period.[1] The milestones involve small muscles (fine motor) in hands and fingers for reaching, grasping, and manipulating objects. The milestones also involve small muscles in the face and head for sucking, chewing, swallowing, and making expressions. Use and coordination of large muscles (gross motor) are central to crawling, standing, and walking.

More milestones in motor development occur during the first two years of life than during any other developmental period.

The rapid growth of physical development follows well-established sequences that differ considerably in timing across children. For example, a normal age range for children to first crawl is 5 to 11 months of age, and a normal range for walking is 9 to 17 months of age in Western societies. Backgrounds are among the influences on when young children reach specific milestones. There are also individual differences in how children approach important motor tasks, such as various combinations of arm, leg, and belly use in crawling. For instance, infants may initially crawl by pulling themselves on their belly with alternating arm movements ("army crawl") or by using both arms simultaneously ("inchworm crawl").[2]

Many separate tasks are involved with each motor action, including perception, planning, balance, and coordination. Visual information is needed for reaching, for example, and using an arm to reach for an object involves balancing the rest of the body. Different motor skills are required for reaching while in different postures.[3] What an infant learns about reaching while sitting does not fully apply to reaching while on his/her tummy or back.

Foundation Skills

- Gross motor development
- Fine motor development
- Good health practices

Effective support for motor development involves focused opportunities for young children to develop and practice specific skills. In addition to the separate tasks of reaching and grasping, these skills include bringing the hands to the body's midline; bringing two objects together at or near the midline; using fingers to hold, explore, and manipulate an object; rolling from stomach to back and from back to stomach; crawling or creeping; sitting; standing; walking; and avoiding obstacles while moving.[4] Studies document the value of systematically supporting development of each motor milestone. For example, research points to early cognitive benefits of opportunities to reach (arm movements) and explore objects.[5]

Motor development is linked to other areas of development. Fine motor skills with hands and fingers facilitate object inquiry, for instance, and crawling and walking open avenues for greater exploration of objects, spaces, and people. Consider the opportunities the crawling infant shown in this section might pursue.

Crossing the midline—moving an arm or leg across the middle of the body—involves the two hemispheres of the brain. Crossing the midline generally emerges when two hands are used to reach for an object.[6] Joining hands together (about 3–4 months), transferring an object from hand to hand (about 6–8 months), and reaching across the midline (6+ months) are more advanced than reaching alone and involve coordination of both sides of the body.

Early fine and gross motor skills are linked to children's later school and social outcomes in different ways. Early fine motor skills are strong predictors of fifth-grade reading, mathematics, and science achievement as well as attention skills.[7] In contrast, gross motor skills are associated with social competencies, including participation in sports and games.[8] Children who readily manage classroom materials, including writing tools, have an advantage in school,[9] and school-age children who are clumsy may be rejected socially or lack confidence to participate in gross motor games, including sports.[10]

NAEYC Accreditation. The NAEYC curriculum standard[11] for physical development recommends an environment that allows infants, toddlers, and twos to move freely to promote gross motor development, such as coordination, movement, and balance, and perceptual-motor integration. Additionally, the NAEYC standards recommend that toddlers experience many opportunities to practice good health habits, such as handwashing and getting enough rest and exercise. Good health practices recommended by NAEYC also include toddlers and older children serving and feeding themselves.

Link to VLS. The Virtual Lab School's course on Physical Development in the infant and toddler track[12] describes how physical development influences development in other domains (Lesson 1), and provides examples of physical development milestones from two months to two years (Lesson 2). The course also describes ways to support early physical development through environments and experiences (Lesson 3), routines (Lesson 4), and active lifestyles (Lesson 5). The VLS course on Healthy Environments in the infant and toddler track[13] includes information on daily care routines, including proper hygiene in handwashing (Lesson 2) and diapering and toileting (Lesson 3). There also is information on daily health checks (Lesson 4), nutrition, feeding, and physical activity (Lesson 5).

How ELM Promotes Physical Development and Good Health Practices

ELM Curriculum activities focus mostly on motor skills while recognizing that optimal support for physical well-being and health include good nutrition, exercise, regular periods of sleep and rest, and regular attention to vision and hearing.

Suggestions for supporting toddlers' good health practices are offered later in this section (see More Practices for Promoting Motor Development and Good Health Practices). Consistent with NAEYC's practice standards, the suggestions focus on daily routines related to good health.

ELM activities that support gross motor skills are entitled Moving Our Bodies. Activities that promote the fine motor skills are entitled Using Our Hands. In addition to activities focused on fine motor skills in the Physical/Health area of the ELM Curriculum, there are opportunities for young children to use small muscles involved in facial expressions in other curriculum areas, especially the Social-Emotional area.[14]

Moving Our Bodies

Balance and coordination are emphasized in most activity plans designed to promote specific gross motor skills. Activities for infants include attention to head control during tummy time,

rolling over and pushing up while on their tummy, creeping and crawling, sitting, and standing. Different contexts and positions are offered. For example, an activity plan focused on standing with caregiver support involves facing toward a caregiver, facing away from a caregiver, and using furniture to pull up.[15] Activities that provide crawling experiences include crawling under a "bridge" and over a low foam shape.

Gross motor activities for younger toddlers (12–24 months) include experiences in moving (crawling or walking) on different textures and up and down steps. Opportunities to practice walking include a small animal parade with peers, carrying items in a bag, and walking a simple path while holding sensory tubes. Activity plans for older toddlers (24–36 months) include jumping, stepping up and down on a stepper, gross motor movements with songs, and arm movements with streamers and while pretending to fly like a bird.

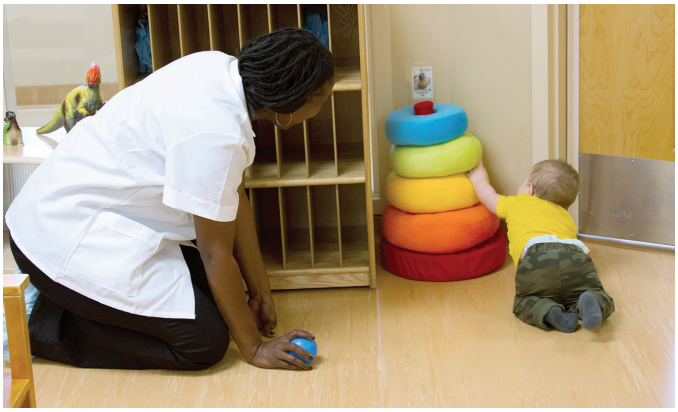
Ball play is used with infants and toddlers to support coordination of gross motor actions. An activity for infants involves creeping/crawling to grasp a ball,[16] for example, and a plan for younger toddlers provides practice in pushing a large ball to knock down jugs.[17] Activity plans for older toddlers (24–36 months) include support for throwing and kicking a ball.

Using Our Hands

Activity plans for infants approach **reaching and grasping** as separate skills, and the coordination of reaching and grasping actions as a more advanced skill. Opportunities to reach and grasp a toy are offered with the infant in different positions (sitting, on back, and on tummy). Activities that promote grasping also generally involve reaching. Some experiences in holding an object are part of activities that focus on grasping. Letting go of an object is supported in some activities that also promote grasping. For infants, **letting go** actions involve dropping an item to the floor or into a container. Use of two hands to reach for an object is encouraged by offering an infant a larger object. Activities also support an infant crossing the midline when reaching for an object. There are activity options for younger toddlers (12–24 months) to manage two objects at once.

Opportunities to manipulate a toy commonly involve sound-making objects because actions that produce an immediate effect are likely to be pleasurable and repeated. Different types of sound-making toys, including bells and a rattle, are offered to infants. Object manipulation activities for toddlers generally also involve self-regulation practice in starting and stopping movement of an object. Activities that support crossing the midline and putting hands together at the midline, such as clapping, are offered for each infant-toddler age group.

Support for manipulating fingers is provided mostly in activity plans for toddlers, although an activity for infants provides an opportunity to use thumb and finger in exploring a toy with holes. The control and coordination of finger use is supported in activities that involve manipulating small objects, such as large buttons and puzzle pieces with knobs, for younger toddlers and activities that involve manipulating felt pieces, beads, and cubes for older toddlers (24–36 months). Holding and manipulating tools, including paintbrushes and crayons, are supported in activities for younger and older toddlers.



Building on the Activity Plans

More Practices for Promoting Motor Development and Good Health Practices

- Describe a child's motor actions. In the picture included in this section, what might a caregiver say to the infant who is reaching for an item in the corner of the room?
- Encourage a toddler to pick up and carry items needed for an activity to the activity space. Example: Invite a toddler to help get blocks used in a block activity.
- Offer tummy time at least two times a day to an infant who is developing head control. The amount of time may be short at first, but over time the infant may be interested in spending more time practicing the control and coordination of neck, stomach, and back muscles.
- During free play with a child who has mastered crawling or creeping, use gestures and words to support moving around a barrier to find a familiar or desired object that cannot be seen from the child's starting position. The cognitive skill of object permanence is supported in combination with motor actions involved in getting to the item.
- Sit on the floor facing an infant who can sit independently or a younger toddler (12–24 months). Invite the child to join you in hand clapping as you say the rhyme, "Pat-a-Cake." The child may engage in clapping and/or respond to the rhyme by moving his/her body.
- Describe the new vantage point of a child who is new to standing. This is an exciting time for the child. In addition to managing balance required for standing, the child can see the space of the room, objects, and participants' movements in a new way.
- Pay attention and respond to signs of fatigue among children who are new to standing, cruising, or walking. They often become physically tired and emotionally sensitive as they learn to process new information and adapt to an emerging skill.
- During an informal gathering with toddlers, offer reminders of things they are learning to do. Example: "Once you were a baby. Now you are two years old. You can wash your hands all by yourself!"
- Include several foam shapes for infants to explore during fully supervised free play. Some infants will happily crawl up on the shape and need assistance to get off. Provide an alternative to going head first by gently turning the infant so feet come down first. Give a verbal reminder to "turn around." A gentle touch reminder on the upper leg may be helpful. It generally takes a lot of practice for infants to remember to go down feet first. Avoid a dramatic reaction to an infant tumbling to the floor. A strong response might prompt an infant to be overly cautious in trying new skills. Offer a simple comment, such as "You tumbled off the mat. That surprised you!"
- Draw attention to a child's visual tracking during a motor action. Example: "You are watching your hand reach toward the bell." Visual tracking is part of carrying out a plan for grasping or moving an object (called motor planning). With repeated practice, infants and toddlers learn that a plan for a motor action may need to be adjusted. An infant's open hand does not pick up a desired toy, for example.
- During free play, provide opportunities for an infant in an unsupported sitting position to transfer an object from one hand to the other hand or to hold an object in one hand while

using the other hand to explore the object. Sitting independently increases opportunities for a child to reach for and manipulate objects.

- Place a large hula hoop on the floor for toddlers to use as a target for throwing sock balls (rolled up socks).
- Say clearly the names of foods offered to toddlers for snack and meals. Point to an item when you say its name. For older toddlers (24–36 months), tell whether a food item you name is a fruit or a vegetable (veggie). Also, invite older toddlers to say the names of foods offered during a snack or meal.
- Offer brief, child-friendly explanations to toddlers for regular routines in your room, such as rest time and handwashing. Emphasize how health-related routines help us have strong bodies.
- Demonstrate and describe how to use utensils and dishes during mealtimes with toddlers.
- Create a simple handwashing song for toddlers. Include key actions, such as wet, rub, scrub, rinse, and dry.
- Tell an infant that you think he/she is hungry or full. Example: "I think you are crying because you are hungry. Let's find some food for you."

Strengthening Your Understanding of Motor Development and Good Health Practices

Here are some suggestions for reflecting on the curriculum's recommended practices for supporting children's motor development.

- Challenge yourself to think of different verbal responses you might offer to a child who is learning a motor milestone. Comment especially on actions toward reaching, grasping, bringing both hands together at the midline while lying on his/her back, creeping/crawling, standing, and walking. What different words can you use to show enthusiasm and support? Consider practicing corresponding facial expressions in a mirror.
- Compare your room's snack and mealtime practices to guidelines offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention[18]. Notice especially the guidance on support of children's emerging fine motor skills in the use of cups, spoons, and forks. Are your room's mealtime practices consistent with the Center's tips on helping young children try new foods?
- There are major differences across children in when they reach specific motor development milestones, as noted earlier. Reflect on what you might say to a parent who compares his/her child to another child in your room and asks about a difference.
- Select an ELM activity plan in one of the four other areas promoted for infants and toddlers. How might the plan support a child's physical development?
- Review the first segment of this section on Physical/Health. What are your thoughts about why fine and gross motor skills are linked to academic and social outcomes in different ways?

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Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals Birth–36 Months

Charts that show the sequence of activity plans for each of three age groups are offered in this section of the *Guide*. The age group is indicated on the right side of the heading on each page.

The charts are organized by blocks and by the five areas promoted by ELM for infants and toddlers. A block covers a two-week period, as described earlier. There are 25 blocks of activity plans in each of the three age groups. The sequence of activity plans across blocks is aligned with well-documented pathways of development and learning.

The foundation skill(s) promoted by an activity plan is shown in boldface. The bulleted text describes the goal of an activity plan.

Each bulleted description represents the 2–3 activity options offered in each activity plan. For example, the Block 3 Physical/Health description for birth–12 months says the following: "Practicing how to shift positions: rolling over, crawling, sitting." There is one activity option in the plan for each of the three movements included here: rolling over, crawling, sitting. Guidance on how to select an activity option is offered in the Effective Use of ELM section of this *Guide*.

Young children benefit from repeated practice with emerging skills. Repetition is included in the sequence of activities. For example, practicing how to calm down after a stimulating experience is offered in Self-Regulation activities for the birth–12 months age group in Blocks 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, and 23. The type of stimulating experience differs across activities, as explained in the description of Self-Regulation in the prior section of this *Guide*. In addition to repeated practice opportunities built into the sequence of ELM activities, caregivers are encouraged to repeat an activity that is appropriate to a child's needs and interests. The sequence of activities is a guide, not a fixed order.

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

Birth –12 Months

	BLOCK 1	BLOCK 2	BLOCK 3	BLOCK 4	BLOCK 5
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about high contrast pictures in a book	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Finding forest animals hiding in book pictures	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Talking about sounds made by items shown in book pictures	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about what animals see	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about a child's routines
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** • Looking at and manipulating different types of objects, including soft and hard toys	**Object inquiry skills** • Looking at and manipulating different types of objects, including water	**Problem-solving** • Exploring one or two toys	**Object inquiry skills** • Looking at and manipulating different types of objects while playing with a caregiver	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Holding and manipulating different toys, including nesting cups
SELF-REGULATION	**Concentration** • Focusing on a moving fish toy	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after a song with actions	**Executive function** • Focusing on and remembering the location of a rattle	**Concentration** • Watching and making facial expressions	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after manipulating a sound-making toy
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in responsive interactions focused on smiling	**Social interaction skills** • Participating in back-and-forth play with a caregiver	**Social interaction skills** **Awareness of emotions** • Engaging in responsive interactions focused on facial expressions	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver while playing with different toys	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in responsive interactions focused on looking at toys and book illustrations
PHYSICAL /HEALTH	**Gross motor development** • Practicing how to move parts of our body	**Fine motor development** • Reaching for, grasping, and holding different toys	**Gross motor development** • Practicing how to shift positions: rolling over, crawling, sitting	**Fine motor development** • Exploring how to hold and shake a sound-making toy	**Fine motor development** • Reaching for, grasping, holding, and moving different toys

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

Birth –12 Months

	BLOCK 6	BLOCK 7	BLOCK 8	BLOCK 9	BLOCK 10
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of animal mothers and babies	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of baby faces	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Playing peekaboo with a caregiver	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of babies	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about different facial expressions
COGNITIVE	**Problem-solving** • Choosing toys to play with	**Object inquiry skills** • Noticing differences between toys	**Object inquiry skills** • Feeling and manipulating objects with different textures	**Object inquiry skills** • Noticing features of objects and animals in a book	**Object inquiry skills** • Looking at and manipulating high-contrast and cause-and-effect toys
SELF-REGULATION	**Executive function** • Persisting in reaching for a desired toy	**Concentration** • Watching the actions of a puppet	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after a finger play	**Executive function** • Watching a ball and a cup manipulated by a caregiver	**Concentration** • Focusing on novel sounds and facial expressions made by a caregiver
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in responsive interactions focused on imitating simple actions	**Social interaction skills** • Noticing how others play with a toy car	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver while playing with a musical instrument	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver as part of looking in a mirror	**Social interaction skills** • Meeting and greeting infants in our room
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating sound-making objects	**Gross motor development** • Practicing how to balance our bodies in a sitting position	**Fine motor development** • Practicing how to hold and release an object	**Gross motor development** • Practicing how to stand	**Fine motor development** • Using both hands at the same time to manipulate a toy

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

Birth –12 Months

	BLOCK 11	BLOCK 12	BLOCK 13	BLOCK 14	BLOCK 15
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of familiar objects	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about saying goodnight	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about items and feeling textures in book pictures	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about different things babies do	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about babies playing *Peekaboo*
COGNITIVE	**Problem-solving** • Choosing and playing with balls	**Object inquiry skills** • Engaging in play with cause-and-effect toys	**Problem-solving** • Finding and moving toward a desired toy	**Problem-solving** • Finding a hidden toy	**Object inquiry skills** • Using our senses to explore toys in different ways
SELF-REGULATION	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after moving slowly to music	**Executive function** • Persisting in play with a novel toy	**Concentration** • Watching and manipulating a toy car	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after participating in a rhyme with hand actions	**Executive function** • Persisting in exploration with different toys
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver while playing with a ball	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver while playing with stacking rings	**Social interaction skills** • Participating in responsive interactions during routine activities	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in play with teddy bears focused on gentle touches	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver while playing with a baby doll
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Gross motor development** • Touching and rolling a ball	**Fine motor development** • Moving hands and arms to and across the midline	**Gross motor development** • Practicing how to roll over, push up, or crawl during play with toys	**Fine motor development** • Practicing eye-hand coordination with novel items, including toys with holes	**Gross motor development** • Practicing early locomotion, including creeping, crawling, or walking

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

Birth –12 Months

	BLOCK 16	BLOCK 17	BLOCK 18	BLOCK 19	BLOCK 20
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Participating in a song with hand movements	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of baby fingers and toes	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of families	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of people in our room	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Waving hello and goodbye
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Playing with familiar items in different ways	**Problem-solving** • Taking apart a stacking ring toy	**Object inquiry skills** • Focusing on color differences	**Object inquiry skills** • Figuring out how a toy works	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Watching a caregiver manipulate and hide a toy
SELF-REGULATION	**Concentration** • Paying attention to hand actions	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after a bell ringing activity	**Executive function** • Persisting in getting a desired toy	**Concentration** • Focusing on blocks manipulated by a caregiver	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after participating in a rhyme with finger actions
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver focused on nurturing actions	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver while playing with nesting cups	**Social interaction skills** • Looking at our actions in a mirror	**Awareness of emotions** • Exploring happy and sad feelings described in a book	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver focused on music and movement
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Coordinating the use of hands, finger and thumb	**Gross motor development** • Practicing how to roll over or crawl under an object during play	**Fine motor development** • Doing hand motions with rhymes	**Gross motor development** • Moving our body while pretending to ride	**Fine motor development** • Practicing eye-hand coordination using two hands

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

Birth –12 Months

	BLOCK 21	BLOCK 22	BLOCK 23	BLOCK 24	BLOCK 25
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about fun things babies do with families	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Participating in a song with rocking movements	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Talking about pictures and sounds of farm animals	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Participating in a song and moving a toy spider	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Listening to the sounds of farm animal puppets
COGNITIVE	**Problem-solving** • Choosing one of two toy possibilities	**Object inquiry skills** • Playing with toys of different sizes	**Object inquiry skills** • Looking closely at pictures	**Problem-solving** • Exploring how to take apart toys	**Object inquiry skills** • Watching and playing with cause-and-effect toys
SELF-REGULATION	**Executive function** • Watching and manipulating a scrunchie and a cup	**Concentration** • Focusing on a rhyme and finger actions	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after moving to music	**Executive function** • Persisting in removing toys from a box	**Executive function** • Watching a toy being hidden for a caregiver to find
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Interacting with a caregiver focused on farm animal pictures and figures	**Social interaction skills** • Playing independently as a caregiver watches	**Social interaction skills** • Noticing what peers are doing	**Social interaction skills** • Noticing a peer's actions while playing alongside each other	**Social interaction skills** • Noticing how peers are playing with toys
PHYSICAL /HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Moving to music with hands and arms and while being held by a caregiver	**Fine motor development** **Gross motor development** • Reaching for and rolling a ball	**Gross motor development** • Practicing to sit, stand, and walk	**Gross motor development** • Crawling and walking on different textured surfaces	**Gross motor development** • Moving our arms and legs, including crawling

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

12–24 Months

	BLOCK 1	BLOCK 2	BLOCK 3	BLOCK 4	BLOCK 5
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Listening to and making zoo animal sounds	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Listening to and making farm animal sounds	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Identifying the sounds of different things in a book	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of different animals	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of print and pictures** • Talking about pictures of farm animals
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** • Manipulating dry and wet sand	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Taking apart objects that connect	**Problem-solving** • Exploring what another person or animal in a peekaboo book sees	**Object inquiry skills** • Making our bodies big and small • Matching big and small things	**Object inquiry skills** • Playing and building with blocks
SELF-REGULATION	**Concentration** • Watching and making fish swim and stop swimming	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after participating in a rhyme with hand actions	**Executive function** • Watching and recalling where a hopping toy rabbit hides	**Concentration** • Looking closely at items to determine whether they are the same or different	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after ringing a bell
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in open-ended play with a caregiver focused on toys of interest to the toddler	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in play with a caregiver and taking turns	**Social interaction skills** • Noticing what others do during play with play dough	**Social interaction skills** • Playing together with different toys	**Social interaction skills** • Playing together with blocks
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Engaging in a finger play	**Gross motor development** • Rolling, carrying, and dropping balls	**Fine motor development** • Making marks with paintbrushes and markers	**Gross motor development** • Crawling or stepping up and down stairs	**Fine motor development** • Doing hand actions as part of songs

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

12–24 Months

	BLOCK 6	BLOCK 7	BLOCK 8	BLOCK 9	BLOCK 10
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of mother and baby animals at bedtime	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about bedtime routines described in a book	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and acting out a story about monkeys jumping on a bed	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and representing wind and rain	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Naming children in our room • Talking about pictures of facial expressions
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Holding and carrying items to a destination	**Problem-solving** • Picking one toy for each teddy bear	**Object inquiry skills** • Watching and making water move	**Object inquiry skills** • Describing and manipulating different types of clothes	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Taking toys apart and putting them back together
SELF-REGULATION	**Executive function** • Moving parts of our body by watching and listening	**Concentration** • Watching and making a toy frog hop and stop hopping	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after participating in a rhyme with hand actions	**Executive function** • Practicing how to freeze our bodies	**Concentration** • Practicing how to find toys that are the same
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Watching and doing actions of children and teddy bears in a book	**Social interaction skills** • Watching and imitating peer actions while playing with toy vehicles	**Social interaction skills** • Playing with peers at the water table and with toy telephones	**Social interaction skills** • Exploring how children's activities and actions are the same and different	**Social interaction skills** • Talking about our families and friends • Recognizing peers in our room
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Gross motor development** • Watching and practicing how we roll our bodies	**Fine motor development** **Gross motor development** • Doing hand and leg actions with music	**Gross motor development** • Practicing walking	**Fine motor development** • Practicing how to shake and stop shaking a shaker	**Gross motor development** • Exploring how to throw a ball

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

12–24 Months

	BLOCK 11	BLOCK 12	BLOCK 13	BLOCK 14	BLOCK 15
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and pointing to our eyes, nose, and toes	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and pointing to our head, shoulders, knees, and toes	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Listening to and saying rhyming words in a nursery rhyme	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Noticing different kinds of sounds	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about food eaten by a hungry caterpillar and playing with toy food items
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** • Putting together and taking apart nesting cups	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Finding toys that are the same and different	**Object inquiry skills** • Exploring spatial relations with shopping carts and small items	**Object inquiry skills** • Naming and manipulating toy animals	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Taking apart and putting together different materials
SELF-REGULATION	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after moving a sound-making toy	**Executive function** • Remembering where a toy car is hiding	**Concentration** • Watching and pretending to drive a toy car with periodic stops	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after participating in a song with actions	**Executive function** • Looking closely to find pictures that are the same
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Saying our name and the names of peers in our room	**Social interaction skills** • Participating with others in a shared activity	**Social interaction skills** • Helping with tasks in our room	**Social interaction skills** • Talking about happy and sad situations	**Social interaction skills** • Exploring how different family members do different kinds of activities
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Making marks on paper with different types of artistic tools	**Gross motor development** • Carrying a bag of items	**Fine motor development** **Good health practices** • Engaging in hand and arm actions with songs	**Gross motor development** • Balancing and moving parts of our body	**Fine motor development** • Putting buttons into a button box

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

12–24 Months

	BLOCK 16	BLOCK 17	BLOCK 18	BLOCK 19	BLOCK 20
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and pretending to be little ducks in a story	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about different types of trucks and how trucks get ready to sleep	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and doing actions that show we are happy	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about an itsy bitsy spider in a story	**Awareness of differences in sounds** • Identifying and talking about quiet and loud sounds
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** • Naming familiar items	**Object inquiry skills** • Exploring location words	**Object inquiry skills** • Pouring water into and out of containers	**Problem-solving** • Exploring tubes and balls	**Problem-solving** • Manipulating small toys and different types of containers
SELF-REGULATION	**Concentration** • Looking for toys that are the same	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after playing a musical instrument	**Executive function** • Watching and making our body move to music and stop when music stops	**Concentration** • Watching and making a pretend butterfly fly and stop flying	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after participating in a song with actions
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Awareness of emotions** • Looking at and making different facial expressions	**Awareness of emotions** • Communicating happy and sad feelings	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about and making different facial expressions	**Awareness of emotions** • Imitating different facial expressions	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about the relationship between a mama fox and a little fox
PHYSICAL /HEALTH	**Gross motor development** • Manipulating and throwing balls	**Fine motor development** **Gross motor development** • Holding and carrying different types of balls	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating puzzle pieces	**Fine motor development** • Practicing how to shake and stop shaking bells	**Fine motor development** **Gross motor development** • Holding and carrying sensory tubes

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

12–24 Months

	BLOCK 21	BLOCK 22	BLOCK 23	BLOCK 24	BLOCK 25
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and exploring different ways to carry a baby	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures of children doing different activities	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Using words for different purposes, including naming items	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about saying goodnight to many different things	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about pictures in a wordless book
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** • Pretending a block or box is something else	**Object inquiry skills** • Using familiar items as intended	**Problem-solving** • Finding a toy dog that hides	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Exploring a ball drop toy	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Manipulating and putting together items that are the same
SELF-REGULATION	**Executive function** • Watching and remembering the whereabouts of a galloping toy horse	**Concentration** • Looking for farm animal toys that are the same	**Self-control** • Practicing how to calm down after shaking and rolling a sound-making ball	**Executive function** • Looking closely to find pictures that are the same	**Concentration** • Focusing on color in sorting different types of pretend foods
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about a child's feelings in different situations	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about ways to calm down when we feel upset	**Awareness of emotions** • Singing with actions about feeling happy and sad	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in play with a caregiver and with peers focused on sharing	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in pretend play with a caregiver and with peers
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating stacking toys and pegs in pegboards	**Gross motor development** • Practicing how to use a riding toy	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating toy vehicles	**Gross motor development** **Fine motor development** • Practicing walking and running	**Fine motor development** • Using fingers and paintbrushes to make marks

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

24–36 Months

	BLOCK 1	BLOCK 2	BLOCK 3	BLOCK 4	BLOCK 5
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Listening to and making zoo animal sounds	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Making demonstrated animal sounds	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of print and pictures** • Participating in book sharings focused on how books work	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of print and pictures** • Using book words and pictures to engage in guessing	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of print and pictures** • Using book words and pictures to learn about colors
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** • Building pretend roads with blocks	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Pulling apart and putting together objects that connect	**Problem-solving** • Guessing what is hiding in a picture book and a bag	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Sorting and matching by color and type	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Building pretend houses and boats with blocks
SELF-REGULATION	**Concentration** • Coordinating actions with words in a song	**Self-control** • Breathing slowly and deeply with or without a prop	**Executive function** • Watching and remembering where a toy frog is hiding	**Concentration** • Matching animal picture cards	**Self-control** • Breathing slowly and deeply while watching our stomach
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Taking turns with peers while playing with animal figures	**Social interaction skills** • Taking turns and sharing with peers	**Social interaction skills** • Watching and imitating actions of a caregiver and peers focused on using play dough • Engaging in pretend play with peers	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in open-ended play with a caregiver and peers focused on telling others what we are doing	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in open-ended pretend play with a caregiver and peers
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Fine motor development** **Gross motor development** • Practicing different physical movements	**Gross motor development** • Stepping up and down	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating sensory materials	**Fine motor development** • Making marks and circles with different colors	**Fine motor development** **Gross motor development** • Practicing different movements and stopping upon request

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

24–36 Months

	BLOCK 6	BLOCK 7	BLOCK 8	BLOCK 9	BLOCK 10
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of print and pictures** • Using book words and pictures to make predictions and talk about in and out	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Connecting book words and pictures to toddlers' experiences	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of print and pictures** • Understanding and enacting actions of characters in a book	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Exploring a book about wind	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Creating sounds and images of items featured in a book
COGNITIVE	**Problem-solving** • Carrying balls to and from baskets	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Making or distributing one item for each hand or toy	**Problem-solving** • Finding items that are the same	**Object inquiry skills** • Identifying and manipulating different types of clothing	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Pulling apart and putting together play items that connect
SELF-REGULATION	**Executive function** • Taking apart and putting together a puzzle	**Concentration** • Focusing on body movements that correspond to a song	**Self-control** • Watching and practicing a tree pose (yoga)	**Executive function** • Moving and freezing our bodies as music plays and stops	**Concentration** • Matching vehicle picture cards
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Imitating actions of staff and peers	**Social interaction skills** • Participating with peers in a shared play activity	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in pretend play focused on a bus trip and toy vehicles	**Social interaction skills** • Talking about how children can be the same and different	**Social interaction skills** • Looking at and describing what children in a book are doing together
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating a ball of play dough	**Fine motor development** **Gross motor development** • Ringing bells to words in songs	**Fine motor development** **Good health practices** • Dressing felt bears and toy dolls	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating water and dry material	**Gross motor development** • Practicing how to jump

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

24–36 Months

	BLOCK 11	BLOCK 12	BLOCK 13	BLOCK 14	BLOCK 15
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Touching, naming, and moving parts of our bodies	**Receptive language** **Awareness of print and pictures** • Connecting visual symbols to items, activities, and songs	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of print and pictures** • Connecting book text to pictures	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Remembering words in a song and rhyme	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about the story of a very hungry caterpillar
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Building simple houses for different types of toy animals	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Sorting familiar items	**Problem-solving** • Engaging in movements that emphasize different spatial relationships	**Object inquiry skills** **Problem-solving** • Comparing clothes worn by people and by animals	**Object inquiry skills** • Putting together different types of blocks
SELF-REGULATION	**Self-control** • Watching and practicing a frog pose (yoga)	**Executive function** • Watching and remembering the location of a moving toy car	**Concentration** • Watching and doing movements suggested in a song	**Self Control** • Watching and practicing a downward dog pose (yoga)	**Executive function** • Taking apart and putting together a puzzle
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Social interaction skills** • Talking about activities and saying our names	**Social interaction skills** • Working cooperatively with others	**Social interaction skills** **Awareness of emotions** • Exploring ways to share	**Social interaction skills** • Caring for items in our room	**Social interaction skills** • Engaging in pretend play with peers
PHYSICAL /HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Practicing hand movements to a song	**Gross motor development** • Moving our arms in different ways	**Fine motor development** • Drawing on smooth and textured surfaces	**Fine motor development** • Putting together materials with both hands	**Gross motor development** **Fine motor development** • Exploring underhand and overhand ball throwing

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

24–36 Months

	BLOCK 16	BLOCK 17	BLOCK 18	BLOCK 19	BLOCK 20
COMMUNICATION/LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about the actions of little ducks	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and showing how construction trucks work	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of differences in sounds** • Talking about children from different countries singing the same song and saying "hello" in different languages	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Pretending to row a boat	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and acting out speckled frogs eating delicious bugs
COGNITIVE	**Object inquiry skills** • Matching pictured and real items	**Problem-solving** • Exploring different spatial concepts	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Putting together toy bears that are the same and different	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Exploring identical wooden figure toys that can fit together	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Exploring novel fit-together blocks of different sizes
SELF-REGULATION	**Concentration** • Paying attention to pictures to determine whether they are the same or different	**Self-control** • Calming down by pretending to be a cornstalk moving in the wind	**Self-control** • Practicing ways to calm our bodies and minds	**Executive function** • Clapping and freezing our arms and hands in response to an orange circle	**Self-control** • Calming down by pretending to be seaweed moving in the water
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about and making different facial expressions	**Awareness of emotions** • Naming and describing some common feelings	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking and singing about different feelings	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about feelings experienced by a little fox	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about feeling up and feeling down
PHYSICAL/HEALTH	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating different types of puzzle pieces	**Fine motor development** • Moving shakers in different ways to music	**Gross motor development** **Fine motor development** • Tossing and catching colorful scarves	**Gross motor development** • Exploring and practicing how to kick a ball	**Fine motor development** • Using tongs to manipulate small blocks

Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals

24–36 Months

	BLOCK 21	BLOCK 22	BLOCK 23	BLOCK 24	BLOCK 25
COMMUNICATION/ LANGUAGE	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** **Awareness of pictures and print** • Talking about and remembering the search for a puppy that is hiding	**Awareness of pictures and print** **Expressive language** • Connecting a printed word to objects and pictures	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Talking about and pretending to be an animal inside an egg	**Receptive language** **Expressive language** • Telling stories with a wordless book and props in a "story bag"	**Awareness of differences in sounds** **Expressive language** • Talking about sounds featured in a book and heard in our room
COGNITIVE	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Participating in games that promote the concepts of one and two	**Problem-solving** • Engaging in different types of pretend roles and play	**Object inquiry skills** • Putting together a Potato Head toy	**Object inquiry skills** • Talking about and acting out opposites	**Problem-solving** **Object inquiry skills** • Sorting and matching by color and type
SELF-REGULATION	**Executive function** • Watching and remembering the location of a rabbit that hops and hides	**Self-control** • Calming down by pretending to be a tree moving in the wind	**Concentration** • Focusing on one of two characteristics of picture cards	**Executive function** • Pretending to sleep, wake, and act like a specific animal in response to the words of a song	**Self-control** • Pretending to be a tree moving slowly in the wind with music and standing still when music stops
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about and practicing ways to calm down when we feel upset	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about how the main character of a story might feel in response to different events and situations	**Social interaction skills** • Talking about and using our hands to do good things for ourselves and others	**Awareness of emotions** • Talking about different feelings and reasons for different feelings	**Social interaction skills** **Awareness of emotions** • Talking about loud and quiet voices, and being quiet
PHYSICAL /HEALTH	**Gross motor development** **Fine motor development** • Engaging in physical movements that include crossing the midline	**Gross motor development** • Practicing different ways to jump	**Fine motor development** • Manipulating and creating with play dough	**Fine motor development** • Using fine motor skills to practice pincer grasps, manipulate tongs, and cut with scissors	**Gross motor development** • Practicing walking on a low balance beam

Effective use of ELM involves intentional use of activity plans, including careful selection of activity options and adaptations of activities. Effective use of ELM also entails individualized learning experiences based on focused observations of children, collaborative connections with families, and support of caregivers in using ELM.

The arrangements and procedures for using ELM reflect best practices and standards in early childhood programs, feedback from ELM pilot sites, and in-depth reviews by early childhood professionals and leading child development experts. The development of the ELM Curriculum is described in the Introduction to the ELM Curriculum section of this *Guide*.

How to Use Activity Plans

Organization

ELM's activity plans for children birth to 36 months of age are organized by blocks. One block offers two weeks of activity plans. There are 25 blocks for each of three age groups: birth–12 months, 12–24 months, and 24–36 months (total of 75 blocks). The 25 blocks in each age group cover a 50-week period.

Within each block are five sets of activity plans, one for each of the five areas promoted by ELM for infants and toddlers. Overall, there are 375 activity plans across the three birth-to-36 months age groups.

Each activity plan supports the development of one or more foundation skills emphasized in one of the five areas promoted by ELM for infants and toddlers. The skills are described in the first two sections of this *Guide*.

Most activity plans also support one or more other areas of development. Below are some examples of how an activity offers secondary support to other areas. The examples are from Block 9 plans for each of the curriculum's three age groups:

- Birth–12 months: An infant is invited to watch a caregiver manipulate a ball and cup separately and together, with a follow-up opportunity for the infant to play with the toys. The caregiver gently describes actions and objects. This activity promotes an infant's persistence in visual attention, which is an important part of self-regulation. The activity also supports fine motor development (Physical/Health) and awareness of words that describe objects and actions (Communication/Language).[1]
- 12–24 months: A toddler is invited to shake a shaker with support from a caregiver that includes opportunities to start and stop shaking. Fine motor development is the primary focus of this activity (Physical/Health). The activity also provides practice in starting and stopping an action upon request (Self-Regulation), experiences in listening to a shaker's sounds (Communication/Language), and awareness of cause-effect connections (shake → sound) and object inquiry skills, including beads in the shaker (Cognitive).[2]
- 24–36 months: A toddler is invited to name and describe items of clothing ("socks go on feet") while dressing a teddy bear. The activity primarily promotes object inquiry skills (Cognitive). The toddler's handling of the clothing supports fine motor development (Physical/Health) and talk about the clothing promotes vocabulary knowledge (Communication/Language).[3]

There are two activity configurations: **informal gatherings** of two or more young children and **one-to-one** experiences involving a caregiver and child. Both configurations offer active, child-focused learning experiences, such as singing songs, responding to music and rhymes, moving our bodies, hearing and talking about a story, and playing with manipulatives. The length of informal gatherings and one-to-one activities is determined by children's engagement.

An informal gathering is a flexible session with several or more interested children and the responsive participation of a caregiver. Mobile infants and toddlers may come and go during an informal gathering. Some children may feel comfortable watching from a distance. The gathering lasts as long as children remain actively involved. It is not intended to be structured similar to a group session for preschool-age children (often called circle time).

One-to-one activities are well suited for tailoring learning experiences, especially following a child's lead, and fostering a strong relationship between caregiver and child. The benefits of individualized interactions with young children are well recognized in the early childhood field, including NAEYC program accreditation standards. The 2019 accreditation standards[4] give more emphasis to one-to-one play and interactions than prior versions.

Components

ELM activity plans are designed for ease of use. The format and components of plans are described below.

The left side of the first page of each activity description offers the following **basic information about an activity**: the foundation skill(s) promoted by the activity, the activity's goal, the recommended configuration (one-to-one or informal gathering), key concepts emphasized in the activity, materials needed, other areas promoted by the activity, and often an optional book(s) that can be shared at a different time.

Organization of ELM Activity Plans: Birth to 36 Months
Promote 14 foundation skills in 5 areas
Organized by blocks
25 blocks (1 block = 2 weeks) for 50 weeks of activities
Each block offers 5 sets of activity plans with 2–3 sequenced options that differ in level of challenge
Length of activity determined by child engagement
One-to-one and informal gathering configurations
Activity plans provide a model of high-quality use, guidance on possible child responses (What To Look For), scaffolding tips, related interest area suggestion, and adaptations for family child care

Most activity plans offer one example of caregiver talk and actions as a model of high-quality implementation. The model is not intended to be used as a script that is read aloud or memorized. Consider the model as the talk captions of a video without the images. Caregivers are encouraged to use their own words and remain fully connected to children through eye contact and responsiveness to their participation.

ELM activity plans are to be used flexibly while maintaining a clear focus on the activity's goal. Some caregivers who participated in the ELM pilot phase for infants and toddlers prepared note cards, informally called "cue cards," with key points they wanted to remember when using an activity.

Key concepts emphasized in an activity are underlined at least once in an activity description. The intent is to highlight where and how an activity attempts to support a young child's beginning awareness of a concept. Here are some examples of concepts: listen, hear, look, watch, touch. ELM's activity plans for infants and toddlers do not include vocabulary definitions, although several activity options suggest ways to describe a word or concept that is central to an activity.

Each activity plan offers a **What to Look For** section that provides guidance on how to maintain a focus on an activity's goal while supporting the actions and interests of a child(ren). This section describes some different ways a child might participate in an activity and how to adapt to possible differences in participation.

Additional suggestions on how to ensure an activity is responsive to the abilities and interests of a child(ren) are offered in a section entitled **More Scaffolding Tips**. There are two types of tips. Extra support strategies offer additional help, often by focusing on specific parts of an activity. Enrichment tips offer ideas for adding challenge to an activity.

Activity plans include suggested **Interest Area** activities that seek to extend an activity to children's play experiences. There also is a **Family Child Care** section in each activity plan that suggests ways to use an activity option in a setting with different ages of children.

Selecting Activity Options

There are 2–3 options in each activity plan. The options are sequenced by level of challenge and, together, provide flexibility to caregivers in responding to children's interests and needs.

The options within an activity plan differ in one or more of the following ways:

- motor skills required or supported by the option
- type of material used in the activity option
- whether and how peers are involved
- complexity of actions or tasks

Decisions about what activities to offer which child(ren) should be based on a caregiver's reflections on the abilities and interests of each child in relation to the goals of activity options. The goals of all activity options within a block are summarized on the opening page of the block. The title of this page is Options to Promote Learning. The goal of an activity is also included with basic information about the activity in the left side of the first page of an activity description.

A quick look at an activity description generally provides enough information to decide whether an option is a good match for a particular child(ren). The What to Look For section can be especially helpful in understanding the focus and challenge of an activity or set of activity options.

In many activity plans, options may be offered to the same child(ren) in a sequenced order within a relatively brief time period. In the Block 8 Physical/Health plan for children birth–12 months of age, for example, a one-to-one experience in grasping and letting go of jumbo pop beads (Option 2) could be offered in one week and an informal gathering with several infants invited to drop jumbo pop beads into a container (Option 3) could be offered the following week. Option 3 is more challenging than Option 2 because it involves peers and the opportunity to drop beads into a container.

There is a wide range of ages in when young children reach developmental milestones. For this reason, ELM activity options do not specify particular ages. However, developmental skills, such as mobile or non-mobile, are communicated in activity descriptions when pertinent. Also, information on the approximate ages at which young children typically demonstrate a specific skill or interest is offered in the Areas Promoted by ELM section of this *Guide*.

The following four factors are especially important to consider in determining whether an activity option is appropriately matched to a child's interests and abilities.

1. **Motor skills**: Many ELM activity plans are organized by **existing** motor skills, such as options for infants who need to be held, can sit with support, and can sit independently. Many ELM activity plans also promote different levels of fine motor skill, such as using hands to ring bells or fingers to connect smaller materials that differ in level of complexity, such as snap

beads or star builders. In addition, many ELM activity plans are designed to support **emerging** physical abilities, such as the gross motor skill of crawling and the fine motor skill of using fingers to manipulate an item.

2. **Materials**: The novelty and complexity of an item(s) used in an activity need to be consistent with a child's interests and abilities. Materials suggested for an activity can often be changed to items that might be of greater interest to a child(ren). Many activity options recommend caregivers select items that appeal to the invited participant(s).
3. **Peers**: Sharing an activity with peers is typically a new experience for young children. For some children, it may be helpful to initially offer informal gatherings that involve one other child only, and gradually increase to gatherings that include more peers.
4. **Repetition**: It is highly appropriate to **repeat** activities of interest to a child(ren). Activities that involve toddlers carrying items from one part of a room to another are highly popular, for example, and provide valuable opportunities to strengthen and refine motor and spatial skills. Activity options offered to children in a given week may come from the current and prior blocks.

Examples of Caregiver Selections of Activity Options for Infants

The following examples show how a caregiver used informal observations of an infant's efforts during an ELM activity or during a playtime or mealtime to select an appropriate activity option for a child.

Communication/Language: An infant smiled, laughed, and made utterances that sounded a little like "boo" during a peekaboo game with a caregiver (Option 1). The caregiver decided to play peekaboo by putting a scarf (instead of her hands) over her face (Option 2). In this approach, the infant did not say "boo" and seemed less enthusiastic about the game. The caregiver repeated the first approach to the game by putting away the scarf and using her hands again to cover her face (Option 1). To support infant's language use, the caregiver repeated the game several days later, saying "peeka" and remaining quiet during the "boo" part of "peekaboo." The infant showed excitement and offered utterances that sounded a little like "boo." Activity plan: Block 8, Communication/Language for Birth–12 months. Factors considered: materials, repetition.

Cognitive: An infant who has reached for and grasped utensils at mealtimes for about a month is now looking closely at the spoon and fork while holding each. This new behavior led a caregiver to offer an activity option that invites the infant to take different kinds of objects out of a box and potentially explore each one (Option 2). The activity is designed to promote object inquiry skills. The caregiver decided to build on the infant's interest in eating-related items by putting a cup, spoon, fork, and small plate in the box. Activity plan: Block 3, Cognitive for Birth–12 months. Factors considered: fine motor skills, materials.

Self-Regulation: An infant showed lots of interest in the special ball used in the first segment of a calming down activity. Initially the infant did not respond to calming down strategies in the second segment of the activity, but eventually calmed down, especially when the caregiver hummed softly. The caregiver decided to provide the infant with more experience in transitioning from an exciting time with the ball to a calmer state by repeating the activity (Option 1). If repeated experiences with the activity do not improve the infant's response to calming down efforts, the caregiver may try shortening the amount of time with the ball. Activity plan: Block 5, Self-Regulation for Birth-12 months. Factors considered: materials, repetition.

Social-Emotional: For about two weeks, an infant has been waving in response to a caregiver who regularly greets and waves at individual infants when she enters the room at midmorning for the start of her work day. A caregiver decided to offer an activity option that involves guided waving to peers in an informal gathering (Option 2). Activity plan: Block 6, Social-Emotional for Birth–12 months. Factors considered: motor skills, peers.

Physical/Health: A caregiver noticed an infant trying to move into a crawling position during floor time. The caregiver promptly offered an activity designed to support the emerging development of crawling skills (Option 2). Activity plan: Block 3, Physical/Health for Birth–12 months. Factor considered: gross motor skills.

Examples of Caregiver Selections of Activity Options for Toddlers

In each of the following examples, a caregiver used informal observations of a child's efforts during an ELM activity or during a playtime to make decisions about an appropriate activity option to offer a toddler(s).

Communication/Language: Toddlers showed interest in a book on farm animals shared during a week of one-to-one arrangements (Option 1). A caregiver decided to offer several informal gatherings the next week focused on toddlers' manipulation of farm animal toys that correspond to farm animals featured in the book (Option 2). Activity plan: Block 5, Communication/Language for 12–24 months. Factors considered: peers, materials, fine motor skills.

Cognitive: Four toddlers readily pulled apart small chains of connected snap beads (Option 1). Several showed interest in putting together their beads. In response to this interest, the next day the caregiver offered the follow-up problem of how to make chains of snap beads get longer (Option 2). Putting together snap beads is generally more challenging than pulling them apart. A week later, the caregiver engaged the toddlers in the problem of how to pull apart a set of connected star builders (Option 3), a more complex material that can be connected in more complicated ways. Activity plan: Block 2, Cognitive for 24–36 months. Factors considered: materials, fine motor skills.

Self-Regulation: A caregiver engaged a toddler in a one-to-one activity designed to support skills in focusing and remembering. The activity involves a child watching a toy frog jump around and then hide under one of three baskets. The child is invited to remember where the frog is hiding (Option 2). The toddler enjoyed watching the frog jump around and hide three different times. Each time, the toddler found it challenging to recall where the frog was hiding. The caregiver decided to repeat the activity the following week with the toddler. Activity plan: Block 3, Self-Regulation for 24–36 months. Factor considered: repetition.

Social-Emotional: A caregiver selected an open-ended play activity to pursue in one-to-one interactions with several toddlers (Option 1). In making this selection, the caregiver considered a related play activity that offered novel materials (Option 2), but decided the novel materials might distract a toddler from engaging in interactions with the caregiver. Activity plan: Block 24, Social-Emotional for 12–24 months. Factor considered: materials.

Physical/Health: A toddler who shows interest in crawling up a step during playtime is offered an opportunity to climb up and down a step with caregiver support. There is a bell at the top of the step for the toddler to ring (Option 1). Activity plan: Block 4, Physical/Health for 12–24 months. Factors considered: gross motor skills.

Adapting Activity Options

In the ELM Curriculum, classroom staff serve as experts in adapting ELM's activity plans. Caregivers are in excellent positions to determine how to adjust ELM activities to support the range of abilities and interests of children in their setting. Adaptations enable caregivers to pursue **challenging and achievable** goals for children[5] that support **meaningful** learning, as described in the Introduction to the ELM Curriculum section of this *Guide*.

Caregivers make decisions about activity adaptations at two major points: prior to offering an activity and during the activity. The prior section on Selecting Activity Options described some activity adjustments, such as selecting appealing materials, that are part of planning and preparing an activity.

Changing the configuration of an activity is sometimes an appropriate way to adapt an activity prior to its offering. A task included in an informal gathering may initially work better for a particular child as a one-to-one activity. Consider the prior example of a one-to-one activity in which an infant grasps and lets go of jumbo pop beads and, as a follow-up activity on another day, is invited to participate in an informal gathering focused on dropping jumbo pop beads into a container (see Selecting Activity Options, subsection on sequenced order). Two elements of the second activity may be new to an infant: the container as a target for beads and involvement of peers in the same activity. A caregiver's reflection on an infant's efforts in the one-to-one grasp/let go activity might lead to a decision to offer a one-to-one activity focused on dropping beads into a container before pursuing this task alongside peers in an informal gathering.

Adaptations made during an activity are unique to a child and situation and are best approached with (1) careful attention to a child's actions in the ongoing activity, plus (2) an understanding of a child's progress in developing skills that pertain to the activity. While it is impossible for any curriculum to offer a comprehensive set of possible adaptations, ELM offers basic scaffolding ideas for caregivers to consider in providing extra support for or adding enrichment to an activity. Below are two of the six scaffolding tips included in the description of a one-to-one activity that invites a toddler to take apart two connected star builders:[6]

- If a toddler tries to separate the stars without success, offer to help by holding one star and encouraging the toddler to pull on the connected star (Extra Support tip).
- Create a three-dimensional shape with several stars and present it to a toddler who seems eager to pull apart stars (Enrichment tip).

The activity description suggests a caregiver may wish to provide several days of exploratory play with connected star builders prior to offering the activity if a toddler has not had experience playing with star builders. The activity also suggests a caregiver modify the activity to suit a toddler's interests and abilities if the toddler experiences considerable difficulty or frustration during or after providing assistance. One idea is to suggest the toddler play with a larger collection of stars by taking stars out of a container and/or putting stars into a container.

Some activity plans consist of laddered options that make it easy to shift to a more or less challenging task during an activity. An example is the set of options ELM suggests for sharing a book with an infant. These include an emphasis on looking at pictures and listening to a caregiver's voice (Option 1); helping to turn pages and communicating about pictures (Option 2); and holding the book, turning pages, and communicating about the story (Option 3). During a book sharing session, a caregiver can easily shift from encouraging an older infant to turn pages (Option 2) to inviting the infant to also hold the book (Option 3) if the infant shows interest and emerging motor skills.

In all adaptation decisions, it is important to remember that young children's interests and

abilities can change quickly. A toy that a toddler likes to play with during one week may be of limited interest several weeks later. An activity option from a prior block that was not of interest to a child when initially offered may be of keen interest some weeks later. A toddler's gross motor development may move from cruising to walking within a matter of several weeks rather than months. In short, activity options selected several weeks prior to their use may need last-minute tweaking.

Planning Form

ELM provides a one-page planning form for a week that is entitled *ELM Planning Form: Week of* _____. A printable version of the form is located in the collection of forms for rooms serving infants and toddlers.

The *Planning Form* is organized by days of the week and the five areas promoted in the ELM Curriculum for infants and toddlers. There are spaces for indicating what is offered and who is explicitly invited to participate. There also are spaces for plans related to Interest Areas, Outdoor Experiences, and Connections with Families. In addition, there is space for notes that could inform the next time the activities are offered. This section is entitled Next Time: Reflections on the Week.

Activities offered to infants and toddlers may include options described in the current or former block of activity plans, an activity described in Building on Activity Plans sections in the Areas Promoted by ELM section of this *Guide*, or an activity of a caregiver's design. Guidance on how to select ELM activity options is offered in the prior section on Selecting Activity Options.

A sample of a *Planning Form* is located in the Appendix. The sample is for a room serving 10 children 12–24 months of age in the 18th week of an ELM program year that began the first week of September 2018. The sample schedule represents the first of two weeks in Block 9. Initials of children indicate who is invited to participate in one-to-one activities or an informal gathering offered for specific children. The Next Time: Reflections on the Week section was completed at the end of the week.

Informal gatherings included in a schedule would be offered several times each day so the developmentally appropriate goal of involving 3–4 children at a time can be met.

Features of the sample plan include the following:

- Two informal gatherings are offered on each Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday.
- Each toddler is offered the opportunity to participate in three different one-to-one activities across the week (Cognitive, Social-Emotional, Physical/Health).
- Toddlers are offered planned experiences with books 1–2 times per day in informal gatherings, one-to-one experiences, and Interest Areas (Communication/Language, Cognitive, and Social-Emotional).

Below are examples of how the selection and sequence of activities in the sample schedule are tailored to toddlers' interests and skills:

- A prior Self-Regulation activity (Block 7, Option 2) is offered on Monday for three toddlers who show strong interest in, and are expected to benefit from, repeating the activity. A prior activity also is scheduled for repeat as an outdoor experience (Block 6, Cognitive, Option 3).
- Five of the 10 toddlers are offered a slightly more challenging one-to-one Cognitive activity (Option 3, Thursday and Friday).
- In two areas, the second informal gathering offered during the week is designed to extend and deepen the first informal gathering:
  - Communication/Language: Option 1 on Tuesday, Option 2 on Thursday
  - Self-Regulation: Option 1 on Tuesday, Option 2 on Thursday

- In two other areas, one-to-one experiences are follow-up offerings designed to extend and deepen informal gatherings offered at the beginning of the week:
  - Cognitive: Option 1 on Monday, Option 2 or 3 on Tuesday–Friday
  - Social-Emotional: Option 1 on Monday, Option 2 on Tuesday–Friday
- There are two one-to-one activities Monday as follow-up to observations of child progress. See later section on Observing and Supporting Children's Progress in Developing Foundation Skills.

This sample plan for a first week in Block 9 leaves opportunities to repeat and extend informal gatherings and one-to-one experiences in a second week, including the following Block 9 activities: Communication/Language Option 3, Cognitive Option 3, Self-Regulation Option 3, Social-Emotional Option 3, and Physical/Health Options 2 and 3.

Completed copies of the *Planning Form* should not be posted for general viewing because they include information about individual children.

Daily Schedule Considerations

Daily schedules in classrooms are driven by many influences unique to a center, including children's ages, staffing, hours of operation, use of shared space, and food service. Below are schedule-related factors to consider in deciding how to effectively support the optimal development of infants and toddlers with activities offered in the ELM Curriculum.

The configurations of ELM activities vary by child age. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of the curriculum's activities for infants are one-to-one experiences, whereas a similar percentage of ELM activities for older toddlers are designed for informal gatherings. Age differences in the configurations of ELM activities are listed in the chart on this page.

Configurations of ELM Activities

	One-to-One	Informal Gathering
Birth–12 months	85%	15%
12–24 months	38%	62%
24–36 months	20%	80%

The percentages reported represent available activity options. What is actually offered to infants and toddlers will differ across rooms. Caregivers in a room serving younger infants only, for example, may decide that some of the informal gatherings available in the ELM Curriculum are appropriate for older infants but are too challenging for their room's current set of younger infants.

The best daily schedule for using ELM activities with infants (birth–12 months) includes flexible, open-ended periods during which some infants can participate in different one-to-one exchanges with a caregiver while other infants are involved in care routines or exploratory play. The relatively small number of informal gatherings in the ELM Curriculum for infants can be offered to several interested infants at an appropriate time during open-ended periods.

The best daily schedule for using ELM activities with toddlers (12–24 months and 24–36 months) includes periods of staff-guided and child-initiated activities occurring at the same time. Although a majority of ELM activities for toddlers are informal gatherings, a schedule that calls for large or small groups each day is not compatible with use of the ELM Curriculum. There are no provisions in the ELM Curriculum for all toddlers to participate in a group at the same time. Most informal gatherings are intended for a small number of toddlers and offered when other toddlers are engaged in their own play or care routines. Toddlers may move in and out of a gathering, as described earlier. The percentage of informal gatherings appropriately increases in the ELM Curriculum as children get

older. Still, one-to-one activities are important parts of the ELM Curriculum for toddlers, as shown in the percentages reported earlier.

The ELM Curriculum was developed for use by a range of direct care staff, as explained in the earlier section on ELM's Starting Points. In the child development centers that participated in the ELM pilot implementation for infants and toddlers, caregivers with different backgrounds reported positive experiences in implementing selected activities.

It is important for staff who use ELM activity plans to have a good understanding of children in their room. This knowledge can inform decisions about activity adaptations that are fully responsive to children's needs. It is also important for staff to have skills in developmentally appropriate teaching, including an ability to use a range of approaches to an activity. As an example, consider the three options for one-to-one sharing of a book with an infant described earlier. In a room of eight infants, caregivers may emphasize looking at pictures and listening to a caregiver's voice (Option 1) with three infants, encourage help with page turning (Option 2) with two infants, and promote holding the book, turning pages, and communicating about a story (Option 3) with three infants.

Finally, a daily schedule consideration is remembering that children function best in settings that use a similar, predictable schedule and environment for the day. Research on family child care homes, for example, shows that planned activities and routines plus positive caregiver attention to children are associated with children's positive behavior.[7]

Preparing the Environment

Caregivers are encouraged to prepare the physical space for an activity by **removing unnecessary items** that might distract a child's attention from the activity. **Collecting items in advance** of an activity avoids the need to leave a setting. If a caregiver leaves a one-to-one activity or informal gathering to secure a needed item, there is a chance a mobile child(ren) will also leave.

Some activity plans for informal gatherings suggest providing each child with a designated spot for sitting, especially if the activity involves physical movement. It is important to recognize that toddlers may come and go from this spot. Commonly used options include a cushion, carpet square, or markings on a carpet.

The Be Prepared section of some one-to-one activity plans suggests particular arrangements of caregiver, child, and material at the start of an activity. An example is a recommendation to sit next to an older toddler with a puzzle placed in front of the toddler. The intent is to informally communicate support for the toddler's direct and active manipulation of the material, with the caregiver as a guide on the side. This approach is consistent with the emergence of autonomy among older toddlers and sends a clear message about the toddler's active role in learning.

In addition to securing particular materials for one-to-one activities and informal gatherings, it is important to select and provide equally appealing materials for children's play that occurs while other children are involved in one-to-one activities and informal gatherings. Access to new and exciting materials is discussed in the following section on Inviting and Supporting Participation.

Interest Area and Family Child Care activity suggestions in the ELM Curriculum include certain types of materials, but often the number of items is not specified because caregivers are better equipped to know the likely number of participants. In deciding how many different materials to provide, caregivers may wish to consider research evidence that suggests playing with one or several toys versus an abundance of toys is linked to the quality of a toddler's play, including focus and creativity. A study that systematically varied the number of toys available to toddlers in an individual play session

found that providing fewer toys, compared to a larger number of toys, was associated with longer duration of toy play and play with toys in a greater variety of ways.[8]

Inviting and Supporting Participation

ELM activity plans consistently suggest that caregivers invite or encourage, not require, infants and toddlers to participate in an activity. Inviting or encouraging participation provides opportunities for a child to express his/her interests and think about choices.

Children will need to be individually invited to participate in one-to-one activities and most informal gatherings. Many ELM informal gatherings are designed for several (3–4) children and, as previously discussed, there may be activities where two child participants are desired. Ideas for encouraging toddlers to participate in an informal gathering are offered in the box on this page.

Caregivers are encouraged to acknowledge the coming and going of mobile infants and toddlers who leave and then possibly rejoin an informal gathering. A caregiver could offer a friendly comment to a child who leaves, such as "Carter, I see that you are going someplace else in our room. We will save a place for you if you want to come back." A young child may not understand the words in this comment, but a friendly tone, facial expressions, and gestures can communicate a welcoming stance. Caregivers are also encouraged to recognize a nearby child(ren) who may be watching a gathering. For example, "Suzanne is having fun watching our game" is a simple way to positively acknowledge an active child observer.

Informal gatherings are often new for young children, as noted earlier. There may be few or no other times in a child's day when he/she shares an activity with peers. For example, a toddler may say he/she cannot see the book during a book sharing

Starters for Informal Gatherings of Toddlers

Below are some strategies for inviting children to join and get settled in an informal gathering:

- Sing a gathering song.
- Invite toddlers to a larger gathering by softly tapping a drum, perhaps while walking around the room, to encourage children to follow along to the gathering.
- Begin a welcoming part of the larger gathering when several children have joined the space. Others are likely to come along when they see or hear fun things happening.
- Infants may like to hold an object during the welcoming part of the gathering. Offer a "trade" for their object if the activity involves a specific item, such as a little fish in "The Little Fishy" song.
- Use an owl puppet to ask "Whoo—Whoo is here today?" Children will enjoy hearing their names.
- Say a little chant that includes each child's name while lightly clapping hands: "We all sit down, we all sit down, we all sit down today. Rya sits down, David sits down. We all sit down today. I sit down, Diego sits down, Camila sits down. We all sit down today!"
- Sing the following to the tune of "London Bridge is Falling Down": "I see friends are sitting down, sitting down, sitting down. I see friends are sitting down, ready for time together. Rian and Damon are sitting down, sitting down, sitting down. Ben and Kylie are sitting down, ready for some fun."
- Clap and say a name: "I will say everyone's name. Then we will clap. (Child's name) is here today. Yeah, (child's name). Now we clap!"

even though the child is sitting directly in front of the book. The toddler may ask to sit in a caregiver's lap. This behavior likely communicates the newness of a toddler's experience in sharing a book with peers. Time and repeated experiences may help. In some situations, it also may be appropriate to use a previously suggested strategy of offering informal gatherings that involve one other child only and gradually include more peers.

One-to-one activities can be challenging to offer because other children in the room may also wish to participate, especially if the activity involves new activities and play materials. Below are several ways to handle this situation.

- Introduce a novel item, such as a set of star builders, to all children in a room before using the new material in a one-to-one activity. During a play period, for example, a caregiver could encourage children to sit near him/her on the floor to explore the new material. Describing the toy and encouraging children to hold and manipulate the toy would be important to offer. Infants and toddlers might enjoy putting the toys into a pail and dumping them out.
- Offer plenty of related materials to interested children while engaged in a one-to-one activity. If some children approach a caregiver during a one-to-one activity with star builders, for example, the caregiver could offer snap beads for children to explore.
- Incorporate children who want to join an ongoing one-to-one activity into the play session and, importantly, focus on one toddler at a time as part of the play. This approach has some characteristics of an informal gathering. The intent is to adapt the focus of a one-to-one activity by moving caregiver attention from child to child in the gathering.

Pace and Presence

ELM activity plans frequently encourage caregivers to follow the pace of a child(ren) in an activity. Like adults, children vary in their general preferences for the pace with which they pursue an activity. Interactions with a child(ren) are likely to be more harmonious when a caregiver is in tune with a preferred pace of an activity. Below is an example of What to Look For guidance on this practice in the curriculum's activity option for taking an infant on a brief tour of items in the room:[9]

> Reflect on the way people behave at a museum or an antique car show. Some individuals move slowly, looking carefully at each item, whereas others move more quickly. Be attentive to differences in the pace each infant prefers for touring the room. Some infants may like a leisurely tour with time to focus on one or two single objects. Other infants may enjoy the motion of being carried and may want to move and see things at a faster pace. Your responsive actions, including language, are key to supporting the infant's learning in this activity.

The What to Look For guidance for the room tour activity described above includes the following comments about possible infant responses:

> An infant may initially look at an object and then look away. You may notice an infant lean toward colorful shapes. When the infant is interested in the colorful shapes, you may notice his/her legs and arms moving. An infant may open his/her mouth when in contact with an interesting object. These movements are indicators the infant finds an object attractive.

In addition to being attentive to a child's preferred pace of an activity, ELM activity plans encourage caregivers to remain connected to a child-guided activity to the extent possible. The prior suggestion that young children should explore objects in their own ways does not mean caregivers should disengage or serve as observers only.

Gently asking about or commenting on a child's actions can promote learning. Consider the following possible ways to connect with a toddler

who is moving a wide paintbrush back and forth across his/her paper:

- A caregiver might ask, "Do you want to tell me about your painting?" and receive from the toddler a "big truck" response that a caregiver can elaborate upon. The caregiver's elaboration of the child's responses could be a simple restatement of the child's response with a few more words, such as "You are painting a big truck" or "Your truck is big."
- If the child appears open to conversation at the moment, the caregiver's simple restatement could be followed by another question, such as "Is your truck carrying something else?" or "Where is your truck going?"
- Suggesting or telling the child to add wheels or something else to his/her truck painting might interfere with the child's own ideas about how to represent a truck.

Paying attention to a child conveys the message, "I see you. You are important!" Child care settings are busy places. A caregiver must keep track of many children and ongoing activities plus deal with another staff member's requests or interruptions. It is easy to be distracted. Yet a valuable goal is to spend some moments with each child every day to provide full attention, even if the time is short.

Caregivers give full attention with their eyes, words, and facial expressions. The child who is the focus of a caregiver's attention should be able to clearly see the caregiver's face and hear the caregiver's voice. Giving full attention also means promptly acknowledging a child's actions or messages, such as "Are you telling me you want to get down?" If it is necessary to look somewhere else or to move to another part of the room, a responsive caregiver can tell a child where he/she is going and, if appropriate, say "I will be back."

Caregiver Talk

ELM's activity plans frequently suggest that caregivers **describe** a child's actions, accomplishments, and the objects a child is exploring. This guidance is similar to the prior recommendation that caregivers offer comments on a child's efforts during a playtime. There are two important reasons for this suggestion. First, children mentally organize a lot of new information during early years of life. Adult descriptions of a young child's actions help a child learn about his/her physical and social worlds as well as how to interact with settings and people. Second, describing what is happening can foster a positive relationship with a caregiver by letting a child know a caregiver is connected to and interested in his/her activities.

Here are examples of acknowledging a young child's actions and accomplishments:

- "O-h-h! Look at you, Tyler! You sure are having fun waving that little fishy!"
- "Trinity, you are looking at our mobile. You are reaching toward the bright shapes."
- "Chloe is playing with you."

Simple, child-friendly statements can have a big impact on young children's understandings. For instance, the last example ("Chloe is playing with you.") gives a toddler words to describe and mentally organize what is happening. It also introduces or emphasizes another child's name.

Descriptions can be most helpful when offered in the **here and now**, at the point a described action is occurring or an object is the focus of a child's attention. Talk that includes **pauses at appropriate points** gives a young child time to look, move an object or self, and/or think without simultaneously attending to a caregiver's words.

Descriptions that are accompanied by **pointing or gestures** can be especially helpful to a young child. In the first bulleted example, for instance, a caregiver could point to the little fishy in the child's hand when saying "fishy" and make a wave gesture with his/her own hand when saying "waving."

ELM activity plans encourage caregivers to speak **slowly and distinctly** in **short sentences** so

young children can begin to understand specific words. **Repeating** words or phrases may seem silly to adults, but repetition is central to young children's learning. Most of the simple songs suggested in ELM activities repeat a word or phrase. Also, examples of caregiver words or phrases in ELM activity plans often repeat a key word rather than use a pronoun, such as *it* or *they*. Consider the following possibilities:

- "You are holding a ball. The ball is in your hand."
- "You are holding a ball. It is in your hand."

The first statement is potentially more helpful to a young child's language development than the second statement because it repeats a key word (ball). The use of a pronoun (it) in the second statement may be confusing to a young child who is learning names of objects and people.

Caregivers are encouraged to avoid moving from description to prescription. Young children benefit from exploring objects on their own within safe boundaries. Prescribing how infants and toddlers should manipulate something can inhibit young children's natural curiosities and discoveries.

For example, toddlers' physical and cognitive development benefits from repeated opportunities to draw and paint without explicit caregiver instruction or caregiver-developed models of what to draw or paint. As another example, ELM activity plans encourage caregivers to refrain from telling a child which hand to use. Toddlers frequently use both hands for various tasks, and hand preference often changes in the first five years of life.

ELM activities generally suggest caregiver **questions** that are followed by a pause. Questions are a part of "serve and return" interactions described in the Introduction to the ELM Curriculum section of this *Guide*. A response from an infant or young toddler is likely to be a simple utterance, gaze, smile, or some other form of nonverbal communication.

Consider the following brief comment of a caregiver to a toddler engaged in dollhouse play: "Samantha, this house is big. Who will live here with you?" The caregiver is offering three potential contributions to Samantha's learning:

- informally introducing or reinforcing the concept of big
- asking a question that might extend the child's play
- personalizing the exchange by using the child's name

If the child responded to the caregiver's question by pointing to several nearby peers, the caregiver could model a verbal response by saying, "Isaiah and Isabella are going to live in the big house with you. Three friends will share this house: Isaiah, Isabella, and Samantha."

ELM activity plans generally discourage use of recorded songs that substitute for a caregiver's own singing. A caregiver can vary the tempo and volume of singing in response to children's reactions. A caregiver can also emphasize key words in a song. Voices in recorded music are often overpowered by the accompanying instruments. Also, a caregiver's voice and facial expressions can create interest and add fun to activities.

Caregivers can search the Internet or ask for the help of a coworker to become familiar with the lyrics and tune of songs included in the curriculum. Copyright protections prevent the inclusion of the lyrics of some songs in activity plans. Some activity plans suggest caregivers make up their own simple songs.

Guidelines

The following four guidelines summarize and extend information offered in this *Guide* about effective use of ELM activity plans.

1. Be familiar with the big picture and details of an activity plan.

- Identify the foundation skill promoted by the plan and review information on the pertinent area to bolster understanding of how the foundation skill is important to children's growth and development. See the Areas Promoted by ELM section in this *Guide*.
- Look at how the activity plan connects to the sequence of attention to a foundation skill. Move forward and backward with several blocks of activity plans in the pertinent area to review where the curriculum has been and where the curriculum is going. Remember ELM's sequence of support for skills includes some repeated attention, as described in the opening page of the Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals section of this *Guide*.
- Look closely at how an activity option helps infants or toddlers develop skills in an additional area. This area is identified as Also Promotes in the left-side box of the opening page of an activity option.
- If a book or song is central to an activity, review it several times to strengthen familiarity. Knowing a story well, for example, can lead to more eye contact with children when the book is shared. Decide what words and phrases to use to describe pictures in a book.

2. Determine a basic approach to using an activity.
   - Identify natural stopping points in the activity that can be used if time runs short.
   - Determine if/when an optional book suggested in an activity option might be shared and whether any parts of an optional book are especially important to emphasize.
   - Secure all materials needed for the activity, including substitute materials, if necessary.
3. Determine ways to adapt the activity option.
   - Anticipate how a child(ren) might react to an activity. Consider adaptations that might improve opportunities to learn from the activity. See the prior section on Adapting Activity Options.
   - Tune in to each child's participation in an activity so on-the-spot adaptations can be considered, including adjustments in pace, pauses, facial expressions, and vocal inflections.
   - Ensure that adaptations directly support the activity's goal and do not encourage drift from the goal or confusion for children.
4. Reinforce and extend an activity.
   - Seize upon naturally occurring opportunities during the rest of the day, or on following days, to support children's understanding of the basic idea of an activity. Talk spontaneously with an individual or several children about some aspect of the activity.
   - Consider whether adjustments of plans for the related Interest Area would be appropriate to make in view of children's reactions to an activity.
   - Explore other ways to support a foundation skill emphasized in an activity. Review information in the Areas Promoted by ELM section, especially Building on the Activity Plans. Consider ways to engage families in supporting children's learning (see later section on Connecting with Families).

Quality of Implementation

The success of any curriculum depends in part on the quality of its implementation.[10] Activity plans and other resources require careful and thoughtful use. Using an ELM activity plan to its full potential requires attention to a plan's details from the perspective of children.

ELM directly addresses five of ten NAEYC program standards (relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, families). The remaining five standards are equally important (health; staff competencies, preparation, and support; community relationships; physical

environment; leadership and management). They directly and indirectly contribute to children's daily experiences, including the quality of learning activities included in a curriculum. ELM can flourish when these standards are solidly in place.

For example, a classroom's physical arrangement sets the stage for children's social and cognitive engagements with materials, peers, and adults. The physical arrangement also facilitates efficient routines and transitions that maximize learning time.[11] Research suggests that the spatial layout of a classroom,[12] and the placement and contents of learning centers,[13] are important contributors to the quality of children's learning, including play.

Positive and supportive relationships between staff and children are another example of how a classroom's quality impacts use of a curriculum. Research with preschool-age children shows that higher levels of positive staff-child interaction and classroom emotional support are linked to children's social competence,[14] and to declines in children's stress levels.[15]

Benchmarks for Using ELM Activity Plans

1. Activity plans are used in the general sequence in which they are offered in the ELM Curriculum. Activity options in a plan are selected in response to the interests and abilities of infants and toddlers. Repeated use of activities is beneficial and appropriate.
2. Materials needed for an activity are secured in advance of using the activity. Space is arranged in advance of offering the activity.
3. Adaptations of activities are made before and/or during use of an activity for the purpose of engaging children in challenging and achievable learning related to the foundation goal promoted in an activity.
4. Caregivers use their own words and style to implement an activity.
5. Use of an ELM activity maintains the goal and content of the activity.
6. Caregivers look at, listen to, and appropriately respond to children to support their active participation in an activity.

Observing and Supporting Children's Progress in Developing Foundation Skills

The idea of "meeting children where they are" is central to excellence in early care and education. This perspective is clearly articulated in the NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). The DAP statement reminds us that learning and development are optimally promoted when new experiences build on what a child already knows and is able to do, and when learning experiences promote an achievable stretch for developing a new skill.[16] An achievable stretch for one child may be a frustrating and confusing experience for another child.

The process of individualizing children's learning experiences begins with observations of a child's abilities and interests. ELM activity descriptions consistently emphasize the importance of caregivers paying attention to a child's actions in an activity and making adaptations aimed at strengthening an activity's contribution to the child's learning and development. The More Scaffolding Tips and What to Look For sections offered in activity descriptions can help caregivers observe carefully and respond appropriately.

In addition to informally observing a child's efforts as part of a particular activity, it is valuable for caregivers to conduct observations that focus on a specific foundation skill and involve more than one setting. Is a child demonstrating progress in the development of a skill in how he/she uses the environment and participates in care routines? For example, in observations of an older infant's fine motor skills, is the infant reaching for toys during a play period and bringing a food item to his/her mouth during snack time?

ELM offers tools for conducting focused observations of children's progress in acquiring foundation skills promoted by the curriculum. Caregivers can use the observation information to (1) develop individualized follow-up plans for supporting a child's progress in developing a particular skill, (2) communicate with families about a child's learning and development, and (3) identify children who may benefit from special services.

ELM's child observation tools are fully aligned with the NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice, which emphasizes the value of assessing children's development and learning for the purposes of planning, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of classroom experiences.[17] Assessment of child progress is the fourth standard in the NAEYC accreditation criteria. Early childhood programs are expected to conduct ongoing formal and informal assessments that help caregivers provide appropriately challenging activities and tailored learning experiences.[18]

Observation Guides

ELM offers guidance for conducting focused observations of a child's progress in acquiring foundation skills in a set of documents that also provides suggestions for individualized follow-up plans and samples of an observation summary for a child's portfolio. The title of each guide is *Guide for Observing and Individualizing*.

There are eight guides for infants (birth–12 months) and nine guides for toddlers (12–36 months) focused on the following skills:[19]

- Receptive and expressive language, awareness of print and pictures
- Awareness of differences in sound
- Object inquiry skills
- Problem-solving
- Self-regulation: self-control, concentration, executive function
- Social interaction skills
- Awareness of emotions (toddler only)
- Gross motor development
- Fine motor development

ELM Benchmarks for Focused Observations of a Child's Progress

1. Observations focused on foundation skills are conducted approximately every four weeks for each child. At least one skill in each of the five areas promoted by ELM are observed across the first 5–6 months of a child's participation in a room. Family and child interests are considered in decisions about specific skills to observe.
2. Observation information is used to develop an individualized follow-up plan that provides precise information on specific ways to support a child's learning and development.
3. A child's follow-up plan is implemented as intended in one-to-one experiences with a caregiver and/or informal gatherings.
4. A child's follow-up plan is phased out, extended, or revised in response to a child's progress.
5. A caregiver(s) and family member(s) communicate in person about observations and follow-up plans.

The guides are available as printable documents in the collection of observation guides for infants and toddlers. In the Appendix is a sample of a guide focused on the fine motor development of an infant (birth–12 months).

Each guide lists behaviors to observe. The behaviors represent dimensions of a foundation skill. For example, observations of an infant's fine motor development skills may focus on an infant's ability to (1) reach for an object, such as a mobile, or (2) manipulate an object, such as shaking a rattle. Observation opportunities are suggested for each behavior. The opportunities involve different settings, including an ELM activity option, interest area, free play period, care routine, rest time, and mealtimes.

Experts recommend conducting more than one focused observation of a child's progress in developing a specific skill.[20] A child's behaviors in one setting, or on one day, may not be an accurate indicator of a child's mastery of a skill. We suggest conducting at least two focused observations of the same skill, preferably on different days and/or in different settings (example: a toddler's social interaction skills during an ELM informal gathering and during free play). Additional observations may be needed if two observations do not provide a reasonably consistent pattern of information about a child's progress in developing the skill of interest. For example, an infant may reach for a toy during an ELM activity but not reach for an equally accessible toy during playtime. More observations of reaching behaviors at playtime or in other settings, such as during a snack or meal, may be informative.

The observations are to be recorded on a form or card provided by a caregiver's center or organization. Succinct entries are appropriate. There are examples of observation entries in the sample *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* in the Appendix.

We recommend conducting focused observations of each child every four weeks. In an infant room of eight infants, for example, two infants would be systematically observed each week. In a room of 14 older toddlers (24–36 months), 3–4 toddlers would be systematically observed each week.

The observations are to be reviewed by caregivers for purposes of determining a follow-up plan that supports continued development of the observed skill. Each *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* suggests ways to reinforce an emerging skill and ways to reintroduce activities that support development of the target skill.

Follow-up Plans

Follow-up plans are typically one-to-one experiences with a caregiver. Plans also may be implemented as informal gatherings if there are other children who would benefit from the same type of support or if skills in relating with peers are a focus of the plan.

It is important for follow-up plans to be precisely written so a caregiver can implement a plan with a child who was observed by a different caregiver. It is also important for a plan to specify the intended frequency of using a follow-up plan. Each *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* includes suggestions of follow-up supports, as noted earlier. A follow-up plan may be a repeat or adaptation of an available ELM activity.

There are examples of follow-up plans based on observations of the fine motor skill of reaching in the *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* in the Appendix. The plans are for infants Carlos and Imani.

The plan for Carlos calls for providing more tummy-time opportunities to reach for interesting toys while on his back and on his tummy. Carlos was able to reach for interesting toys during observations of his reaching skill in three different situations. He reached with one hand in each situation.

The plan for Imani calls for placing a variety of toys in containers for her to discover, reach for, and hold, including toys that encourage her to reach and grasp with two hands. Imani used both of her hands to reach for a cylinder in the most recent of three observations of her reaching skill. Coordinating the use of two hands in reaching for and manipulating an object is a developmental advance.

The dates of observations and a brief summary of the corresponding follow-up plan are recorded on the child's *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* form. There are two versions of this form: one for infants (birth–12 months) and one for toddlers (12–36 months). Printable copies of the forms are available in the online collection of forms for infants and toddlers.

The *Snapshot* form provides caregivers with a summary of observations conducted on a specific child during a year or a period of time determined by the leadership of a center or room. The form is also an efficient reminder of individualized work with a child.

A sample of a *Snapshot* form for an infant is located in the Appendix. The sample form is for Carlos, who is one of two infants represented in the examples of observations and follow-up plans in the *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* in the Appendix. See the observation dates and brief summary of the follow-up plan in the Physical/Health section of the *Snapshot*. As noted earlier, the follow-up plan for Carlos calls for tummy time with small toys of interest. Carlos is to be encouraged to reach for the toys while on his tummy and also on his back.

Caregivers are to include follow-up work with a child on the *ELM Planning Form* for the week. This step ensures the effort becomes a part of a week's schedule. The sample *ELM Planning Form* in the Appendix includes follow-up activities with two toddlers: C.R. and C.N. (Communication/Language) on Monday. Most likely a follow-up plan will be entered on the *ELM Planning Form* about a week after observations are conducted, depending on the timeline for leadership review of a room's plans for a week.

What Skills Should Be Observed?

Caregivers need to make decisions about specific skills to systematically observe for each child. We suggest these priorities:

1. Observe one or more skills in each of the five areas promoted by ELM during the first six months of a child's participation in a room. Each area is linked to later development and deserves a focused observation sooner rather than later.
2. Observe skills that are of particular interest or concern to caregivers and family members. A toddler may have difficulty in self-control, for example. Focused observations of this self-regulation skill, including efforts in ELM's calming down activities and transition to rest times, may provide insights into behavior patterns that can inform the development of individualized supports.
3. Observe skills directly related to a child's interests. What does a non-mobile infant like to look at and touch? What areas of a room does a mobile infant or toddler gravitate to? What skills facilitate a child's participation in these areas?

Observations of specific skills should occur after a child has been introduced to and had multiple opportunities to practice or use the skill. The *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* forms indicate the block in which ELM activities begin giving attention to each foundation skill. See also the Sequence of Skills and Learning Goals charts in this *Guide*.

Sharing a child's *Snapshot* form with his/her family during conferences and other confidential exchanges keeps important people in a child's life informed of their child's progress. Also, the list of foundation skills on the *Snapshot* form gives concrete information on important aspects of early development. Discussion of progress information may lead to discussion of how family and caregivers can work together to support specific skills. See the next section on Connecting with Families.

Child responses to a follow-up plan should be consistently monitored. Sometimes it is appropriate to continue provision of follow-up support beyond the week it is initially offered. Continued use of the follow-up plan may not be necessary if a child readily demonstrates solid progress in developing the targeted skill. Another possibility is to revise the follow-up plan. It may be beneficial to adjust a plan by slightly increasing its challenge. For example, Carlos could be given opportunities to reach for and hold a toy with both hands.

If a child shows no or limited progress with a targeted skill, one or more of the following possibilities may be pursued:

- Consider revising the follow-up plan. Is it sufficiently focused or might attention to a different aspect of the skill be more productive to pursue?
- Consider whether a related, simpler skill may be more appropriate to promote. For example, an infant may benefit from more practice in grasping and holding a shaker before shaking a shaker.
- Gather more information through additional observation.
- Involve caregivers who are familiar with the child in decisions about follow-up plans. Tapping multiple perspectives on the child's skills can be informative.
- Secure the expertise of a specialist. Developmental issues may be involved in a child's progress.

Connecting with Families

ELM offers three curriculum-based resources to help infant-toddler caregivers develop and maintain reciprocal relationships with families. The resources include family learning activity suggestions and two tools for communicating child progress information with families. The tools include the *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* form described in the prior section and examples of observation summaries for a child's portfolio.

ELM fully embraces the NAEYC developmentally appropriate practice position statement regarding the value of early childhood program staff and families sharing with each other their knowledge of the child and understandings of child development and learning.[21] The resources also reflect the NAEYC accreditation standard that calls for programs to establish and maintain collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings (standard 7).[22]

The Virtual Laboratory School (VLS) Infants and Toddlers track on Family Engagement offers information on family-centered practices (Lesson 1), honoring differences among families (Lesson 1), ways to promote family engagement (Lesson 2), ways to communicate with families (Lesson 3), families of children with special needs (Lesson 4), and ways to support military families and families facing challenges (Lesson 5).[23]

Readiness Starts Early

ELM provides a set of brief **parenting tips** in a handout known as *Readiness Starts Early*. There is one handout for every two weeks of ELM's 50-week coverage (total: 25 handouts). The tips in each handout directly extend activities in the corresponding block of activities for classrooms. For example, an activity in handout number 8 suggests that a family with a toddler 12–24 months of age point out and talk about examples of wind, such as things moving in outdoor wind, air moved by an indoor fan, or blowing out a candle. This corresponds to a book on wind shared with toddlers in a Communication/Language activity as part of Block 8 for 12–24 months of age. The intent is to provide families with opportunities to reinforce and extend children's current learning experiences in the classroom.

The one-page document may be sent to and easily viewed on smartphones. Hard copies of the document also may be distributed to families. Parents and other family members are likely to be selective in what activities they pursue with their child based on the child's interests and/or parents' goals for their child. Some families may ignore the resource or look at it infrequently. In general, however, recent research conducted with large, nationally representative samples indicates that parents are more engaged in learning activities with their children than parents a decade ago.[24]

Tools for Sharing Child-Specific Progress Information

As noted earlier, there are **examples of portfolio entries** for sharing specific information about a child's progress in developing foundation skills promoted by ELM. The examples are offered in each *Guide for Observing and Individualizing*. These resources are described in the prior section on Observing and Supporting Children's Progress in Developing Foundation Skills in this *Guide*.

A child's *ELM Snapshot of Child Progress* form, described in the prior section, can serve as a useful springboard for conversations with family members about specific areas of development and learning. Talking about how classroom and family can collaboratively support particular aspects of a child's growth and development is a meaningful way to act on the program-family partnership concept emphasized in NAEYC developmentally appropriate practices. Discussions guided in part by the *ELM Snapshot* form also may lead to information about parent/caregiver priorities or concerns that can be included in decisions about skills to systematically observe. See in the prior section the box on What Skills Should Be Observed?

Training Resources

Basic Training Plan: Five Key Steps

1. Understand essential information in the *ELM User Guide*, including the following:
   - ❍ ELM's research-based approach to promoting school readiness and life success;
   - ❍ the importance and sequence of foundation skills promoted by ELM; and
   - ❍ how ELM reflects developmentally appropriate practice and supports NAEYC accreditation.
2. Plan your classroom's daily schedule.
   - ❍ Review the Daily Schedule Considerations section of this *Guide*.
   - ❍ Make adjustments in the existing daily schedule, if needed.
   - ❍ Center-level decisions about staff schedules and age groupings may be needed for effective use of ELM.
3. Become familiar with components and effective use of activity plans.
   - ❍ Review all information in the How to Use Activity Plans section of this *Guide*.
   - ❍ Look closely at each component of an activity plan and carefully read or talk through several descriptions of activity options to see how the components work together.
   - ❍ Consider how an activity's goal (listed in the upper left area of first page) is promoted in the option.
   - ❍ Imagine how an activity might work with different children you know. How might you adapt the activity in advance of offering it? See information on Adapting Activity Plans in How to Use Activity Plans.
   - ❍ Become familiar with the *ELM Planning Form: Week of* _____.
4. Understand approaches to tailoring children's learning experiences, including the selection of activity options for particular children.
   - ❍ Review the information on Selecting Activity Options and Adapting Activity Options in the How to Use Activity Plans section of this *Guide*.
   - ❍ Become familiar with how focused observations are used to develop follow-up plans, including the sample of *Guide for Observing and Individualizing* in the Appendix of this *Guide*.
   - ❍ Consider how focused observations and follow-up plans could be helpful to an infant or toddler you know.
   - ❍ Become familiar with the *Snapshot of Child Progress*.
5. Consider ways ELM can help strengthen existing partnerships with families.
   - ❍ Identify ways to introduce ELM to families.
   - ❍ Determine a dissemination plan for the *Readiness Starts Early* resource.
   - ❍ Brainstorm strategies for using the *Readiness Starts Early* resource to foster collaborations with families that support each child's learning and development.
   - ❍ Determine how to incorporate staff-recorded information on planning forms (such as the *Snapshot of Child Progress*) into parent-staff conferences.

ELM Online Trainings

Six online trainings on understanding and using ELM are available. Three trainings are for trainers of direct care staff and three trainings are for direct care staff. The content of each training pertains to the full age span (birth through five years) of the ELM curriculum.

The online trainings supplement and enhance information available in the two *User Guides* for ELM: Birth–36 months and 3–5 years. The trainings offer additional examples of curriculum use and suggestions of how to strengthen understanding of ELM. The online trainings are not an alternative way to become familiar with essential information included in a *User Guide*.

The trainings for direct care staff give attention to successful use of ELM, including developmentally appropriate teaching strategies (Lesson 1); ways to make the most of activity plans, including adaptations designed to engage all children in a learning activity (Lesson 2); and approaches to effectively supporting differences in children's development and learning (Lesson 3).

The online trainings for trainers of direct care staff offer suggestions of how to introduce ELM to direct care staff by expanding on the five key steps described above (Lesson 1); ways to support classroom staff in making decisions about activity adaptations and individualized learning experiences for children (Lesson 2); and approaches to coaching classroom staff on effective use of ELM, including feedback on activity plan use (Lesson 3).

ELM Activity Observation Checklist

A checklist of items for observing caregiver use of an ELM activity plan is available. There is a checklist for infant-toddler rooms and a checklist for rooms serving children 3–5 years of age. Each checklist for an infant-toddler room is designed for observing an ELM one-to-one or informal gathering activity during its typical time. The checklist also offers items for observing caregiver actions during a period of child-initiated activities. The checklist may be used by caregivers for deepening their understanding of best practices in using ELM activities.

The checklist's items focus on planning and preparation, caregiver actions during the one-to-one/informal gathering activity, and caregiver support of child-initiated activities, including an interest area. The form offers space for observation notes. There are four response options for each item:

- N/A: not applicable. Example: A book sharing was not an intended part of the observed activity.
- No: no evidence of the checklist item during the period of observation. Example: The caregiver did not attempt to connect the content of the activity to children's experiences and/or current understandings.
- Partial: some but not all aspects of the item were observed. Example: One of an activity's two goals were met.
- Yes: the caregiver actions or room arrangements described in the item were fully present.

Prior to an observation, the trainer (observer) should (a) become familiar with the ELM activity that is the focus of the observation, and (b) review notes from prior observations to identify actions that may have been targeted for improvement or strengthening. It is beneficial to monitor and provide feedback on staff progress in supporting children's learning.

We recommended using the checklist to observe caregiver use of an ELM activity at least once a month. More frequent observations may be appropriate during the early months of ELM use and/or if a caregiver seems to have challenges in using activity plans. We recommend observing activity in different areas. Example: Observe a Communication/Language activity in the first month and a Cognitive activity in the second month. Caregiver skills in implementing activity plans may differ across content areas promoted by ELM.

A structured discussion with the caregiver about the observation should occur promptly. We recommend the discussion include the following elements:

- The trainer (observer) objectively shares observation information by showing the completed form and describing observed caregiver actions that contributed to the selected response option (N/A, No, Partial, Yes). The trainer also shares observations about caregiver progress in supporting children's learning by comparing actions observed in the most recent observations to caregiver actions previously observed.
- The caregiver offers his/her perspective on the observed actions, including reasons for various actions taken or not taken.
- The trainer and caregiver identify aspects of the activity's use that can be improved or strengthened, and jointly agree on steps to take toward the desired improvement or strengthening.
- The trainer and caregiver review observed caregiver actions that are important to continue in future uses of activity plans.
- The trainer and caregiver discuss benefits of desired staff practices for children's learning and development.

Steps to improve or strengthen use of an activity plan may involve revisiting procedures and guidance offered in this *Guide* or examples offered in an online training. For example, a caregiver may benefit from reviewing information on how to adapt an activity.

Example of an Activity Observation and Coaching Session with a Caregiver

The sample of a completed *ELM Activity Observation Checklist: Birth–36 Months* in the Appendix reports a trainer's observation of an informal gathering in which toddlers are to practice naming pictured items of familiar clothing and talk about where and when different types of clothing are worn (Block 9, Cognitive, Option 1 for 12–24 months). The trainer also observed a play period.

The observation form indicates the caregiver was prepared for the activity and read the book with enthusiasm. The caregiver responded to some but not all of the comments and actions of several of the four toddlers who participated. The caregiver did not encourage toddlers to point to, name, or talk about similar clothing they wear and where it is worn on their body.

A coaching session was held with the caregiver several days after the observation. The trainer gave the caregiver a completed copy of the observation form and shared highlights of what was observed. The trainer acknowledged the caregiver's preparation for the activity and how the caregiver invited toddlers to join the gathering by walking around the room with a teddy bear and using a teddy bear voice. The trainer also described the caregiver's enthusiastic approach to sharing the book, especially building anticipation of what the teddy might wear next. The trainer explained that there were some missed opportunities to support learning. These included asking the toddlers to point to and talk about clothing items they were wearing and responding to some toddler actions, such as a child pointing to her shirt during discussion of a shirt as part of the book. The trainer said she wondered if the caregiver's conversation with a staff member during the play period was more important than remaining connected to the toddlers' play.

The caregiver explained that she enjoyed reading the book and liked the way the book was organized for supporting the children's anticipation of what the teddy bear would wear next. The caregiver said she did not feel comfortable talking with the toddlers about underwear and parts of their body that underwear covers. She explained that because she did not want to ask the toddlers to talk about the first item of clothing presented in the book (underwear), she simply forgot to ask about other pieces of clothing discussed in the book. The caregiver also explained that she thought all toddlers at the gathering knew the names of clothing and it was not necessary to talk about whether they were also wearing the clothing item and where it is worn. The caregiver said she noticed a toddler point to her shirt when the book talked about a shirt, and she did not respond because she wants toddlers to use their words, not just point.

The trainer and caregiver made a list of positive practices the caregiver should continue to use with the toddlers. They talked about benefits of these practices. The trainer asked the caregiver to think of other times during the day when she might mention a toddler's bottom. The caregiver said she often asks the toddlers to sit on their bottoms. The trainer pointed out how the caregiver is currently using the name of a body part that could have been mentioned in the discussion of a part of our body that is covered by underwear. The caregiver explained that a bottom was not shown in the book's picture of underwear. The trainer explained that a goal of the activity was to talk about clothing, not read the book only, and it would be cognitively helpful for the toddlers to think and talk about something that was not shown in the book. The trainer suggested the caregiver could encourage language use by asking a toddler what he/she is pointing to. The caregiver said that the next time she uses a book in any activity, she will think in advance of how to connect the book to what children know. The caregiver also said she would work harder to remain focused on toddlers' play.

Endnotes

1 ELM Curriculum's Block 9, Self-Regulation, Option 2 for 12–24 months.
2 ELM Curriculum's Block 9, Physical/Health, Option 1 for 12–24 months.
3 ELM Curriculum's Block 9, Cognitive, Option 3 for 12–24 months.
4 National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019). *NAEYC early learning program accreditation standards and assessment items.* Washington, DC: Author.
5 National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2020). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.* Washington, DC: Author.
6 ELM Curriculum's Block 2, Cognitive Option 1 for 12–24 months.
7 Rusby, J. C., Jones, L. B., Crowley, R., & Smolkowski, K. (2013). The child care ecology inventory: A domain-specific measure of home-based child care quality to promote social competence for school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *28*, 947–959.
8 The fewer toys situation provided one toy from each of four types: educational, pretend, action, and vehicles (total: 4 toys). The larger number of toys situation provided four of each of the four types of toys (total: 16 toys). Source: Dauch, C., Imwalle, M., Ocasio, B., & Metz, A. E. (2018). The influence of the number of toys in the environment on toddlers' play. *Infant Behavior and Development*, *50*, 78–87.
9 ELM Curriculum's Block 1, Cognitive, Option 1 for Birth–12 months.
10 Halle, T. G., Metz, A. J., & Martinez-Beck, I. (Eds.). (2013). *Applying implementation science in early childhood programs and systems*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
11 Reutzel, D. R., & Jones, C. D. (2013). Designing and managing effective early childhood classroom environments. In D. R. Reutzel (Ed.), *Handbook of research-based practice in early education* (pp. 81–99). New York: Guilford.
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14 Bulotsky-Shearer, R. J., Wen, X., Faria, A.-M., Hahs-Vaughn, D. L., & Korfmacher, J. (2012). National profiles of classroom quality and family involvement: A multilevel examination of proximal influences on Head Start children's school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *27*, 627–639.
15 Hatfield, B. E., Hestenes, L. L., Kintner-Duffy, V. L., & O'Brien, M. (2013). Classroom emotional support predicts differences in preschool children's cortisol and alpha-amylase levels. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *28*, 347–356.
16 National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020).
17 National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020).
18 National Association for the Education of Young Children (2019).
19 There is not a guide for observing good health practices.
20 Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children. (2015). *DEC recommended practices monograph series no. 1: Enhancing services for young children with disabilities and their families.* Author: Arlington, VA.
21 National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020).
22 National Association for the Education of Young Children (2019).
23 www.virtuallabschool.org/infant-toddler/family-engagement
24 Bassok, D., & Latham, S. (2017). Kids today: The rise in children's academic skills at kindergarten entry. *Educational Researcher*, *46*, 7–20.

Appendix

Sample (12–24 months)

Classroom: *Green* **Staff:** *M.S., L.B.*

ELM Planning Form for Week of *December 7, 2018*

Birth–36 Months

	Communication/Language		Cognitive		Self-Regulation		Social-Emotional		Physical/Health	
	Who	**What**	**Who**	**What**	**Who**	**What**	**Who**	**What**	**Who**	**What**
Monday	*R.C.*	*Follow-up*	*All**	*B 9, O 1*	*I.P., S.B.,*		*All**	*B 9, O 1*	*B.L.*	*B 9, O 1*
	C.N.	*Follow-up*			*C.R.*	*B 7, O 2*			*D.P.*	*B 9, O 1*
Tuesday	*All**	*B 9, O 1*	*A.Y.*	*B 9, O 2*	*All**	*B 9, O 1*	*T.L.*	*B 9, O 2*	*C.R.*	*B 9, O1*
			I.P.	*B 9, O 2*			*S.B.*	*B 9, O 2*	*C.N.*	*B 9, O1*
			D.M.	*B 9, O 2*						
Wednesday			*T.L.*	*B 9, O 2*			*A.Y.*	*B 9, O 2*	*M.S.*	*B 9, O 1*
			S.B.	*B 9, O 2*			*B.L.*	*B 9, O 2*		
							D.P.	*B 9, O 2*		
Thursday	*All**	*B 9, O 2*	*C.R.*	*B 9, O 3*	*All**	*B 9, O 2*	*M.S.*	*B 9, O 2*	*S.B.*	*B 9, O 1*
			C.N.	*B 9, O 3*			*I.P.*	*B 9, O 2*	*T.L.*	*B 9, O 1*
							D.M.	*B 9, O 2*		
Friday			*D.P.*	*B 9, O 3*			*C.R.*	*B 9, O 2*	*A.Y.*	*B 9, O 1*
			B.L.	*B 9, O 3*			*C.N.*	*B 9, O 2*	*D.M.*	*B 9, O 1*
			M.S.	*B 9, O 3*					*I.P.*	*B 9, O 1*
Interest Area	*Remember to bring writing tool to discussions with toddlers about their drawings.*		*Dress the dolls on Monday morning or sooner.*		*Select CD on Monday.*		*Offer different sizes of mirrors.*		*Add bells to Interest Area on Thursday and Friday if toddlers seem ready for a different sound maker.*	

Outdoor Experiences	**Connections with Families**	**Next Time: Reflections on the Week**
Offer again the water pouring activity with sand and containers (Block 6, Cognitive Option 3). It was popular and connects to a C/L water table activity (Block 9, Option 3) scheduled for next week.	*Put an extra copy of All Kinds of People on family table so parents see book being shared individually with children. Invite parents to loan a photo of their child engaged in a family activity, to enhance a session in two weeks on being a part of a family (Block 10, Social-Emotional Option 1).*	*Toddlers really liked the books on wind, clothing, and children. Did lots of pointing in book on children. Knew more clothing than we expected. Loved dressing a doll. Liked watching freeze game and doing it later. Hard for some to hold still! Use a calmer CD for SR Interest Area. Bells in P/H Interest Area bothered some toddlers.*

*All = An informal gathering offered several times during the day, typically to 3–4 different interested toddlers each time. B = Block number, O = Option number

Early Learning Matters

Birth–12 Months

Physical/Health: Fine Motor Development[1]
WHEN INTRODUCED: Block 2
BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE • Reaching • Grasping • Manipulating

EXAMPLES OF OBSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

Behaviors may be observed during a care routine, such as a mealtime or a diaper change; playtime; or during a guided activity, including a book sharing. Pertinent ELM activities (Physical/Health) are cited in parentheses.

Reaching

- Uses primarily one hand to reach for an item, such as the following:
  - a cup or piece of food during mealtime
  - a ring while on back or tummy (Block 2, Option 1) or sitting (Block 2, Option 2)
  - a cylinder-shaped toy (Block 2, Option 3) or blocks or snap beads (Block 5, Options 2 and 3) while sitting
  - a rattle or bell (Block 6, Options 1 and 2), small toy (Block 8, Options 1 and 2), a ball (Block 22, Option 1), or sock rattle (Block 14, Option 1)
- Uses two hands to reach for an item, such as a rattle (Block 10, Option 1)
- Reaches for a toy that is suspended over the infant (Block 5, Option 1), including a mobile or appealing toy hanging above the infant during a diaper change or a playtime with an infant gym/mobile
- Reaches as part of demonstrated hand moves, including reaching up during a rhyme (Block 18, Options 1 and 2) or reaching up, down, and to the side (Block 12, Option 1)
- Reaches across the midline, including reaching to catch a toy (Block 12, Option 3)
- Brings both hands together to clap (Block 20, Option 3)

Guide for Observing and Individualizing

Grasping

- Uses primarily one hand to hold an item, such as a bell or rattle (Block 4, Option 1; Block 6, Options 1 and 2)
- Uses two hands to hold an item, such as a bottle or cup (mealtime) or toy bear or ball (Block 10, Options 2 and 3)
- Uses primarily one hand to grasp, hold, and let go of an item, such as a small toy (Block 8, Options 1 and 2) or ring while sitting (Block 2, Option 2)
- Uses one or two hands to hold and bring an item to the mouth, such as food at mealtime
- Grasps and holds an item in each hand, such as blocks (Block 5, Option 2) or snap beads (Block 5, Option 3)

Manipulating

- Shakes a bell or rattle (Blocks 4 and 6)
- Uses two hands to play a musical toy (Block 16, Option 1), such as shaking a rattle or bell (Block 4, Option 3; Block 20, Option 2)
- Taps two toys together at the midline (Block 12, Option 2)
- Uses thumb and finger to explore a toy with holes (Block 14, Options 2 and 3) or turn pages of a book (Block 16, Option 2)
- Does more than one type of hand motion with rhymes (Block 18, Options 1 and 2)
- Intentionally lets go of a small item (Block 5, Option 3; Block 8, Options 2 and 3)

EXAMPLES OF FOLLOW-UP LEARNING SUPPORTS

Reintroduce

Reaching

- Offer Block 2 to support experiences in reaching while on back or tummy (Option 1) or sitting with or without support (Options 2 and 3).
- Place a favorite toy or instrument on a tray, or hold a toy or instrument near the infant's chest and midline. Gently shake the toy or instrument to engage the infant's attention. Offer soft, encouraging words to promote reaching for the toy or instrument at the midline.
- Clap hands in a pronounced way while singing songs to promote interest in bringing hands together at the midline.

Grasping

- Repeat Block 2, Option 2 with a toy of interest to an infant. Offer Block 2, Option 3 to an infant who can sit independently.
- Offer toys of varying shapes and sizes to promote an infant's grasp of an item. Describe an infant's changes in hand movements in order to get a better a grip on a toy.
- Offer Block 10, Options 2 and 3 to help an infant develop skill in holding an object with two hands.

Manipulating

- Choose an appropriate activity from Block 4 to promote skill in shaking a musical instrument.
- Repeat Block 14, Option 2 or 3 to provide practice in placing a finger into a ball.
- Repeat Block 18, Option 1 or 2 to provide experiences with intentional hand movements.
- Support experience in letting go of an item by engaging an infant in a game of "give and take." Offer a toy and then place your open hand near the infant's hand that is holding the toy. Invite the infant to give you the toy. If the infant wishes to continue holding the toy, offer a second toy that the infant may take with his/her other hand or with the currently occupied hand by dropping the current toy.

Reinforce

Reaching

- Attach a colorful toy to a number of links. Place an infant on his/her back and dangle the links and toy near the infant's chest. Speak in a soft and friendly tone to encourage the infant to swipe at and reach for the toy. Add or remove links in response to the infant's ease or difficulty in swiping at and/or reaching the toy.
- Place an appealing toy within appropriate proximity to an infant to provide practice in reaching. When an infant is on his/her back, place the toy toward the middle of the infant's chest to promote reaching toward the midline. Place a tray of several toys in front of a sitting infant to support practice in reaching.
- For an older infant, place toys that can be used together on a small shelf in an arrangement that promotes reaching across the midline. Encourage the infant to pull up to a standing position to see what is on top of the small shelf. Invite the infant to move the toys for a purpose. Examples:
  - Place a doll on one side of the shelf and a bottle toward the other side. Encourage the infant to give the baby the bottle.
  - Place a parent-sized stuffed animal on one side of the shelf and a baby-sized stuffed animal toward the other side. Encourage the infant to put the baby back with the parent.

Grasping

- Offer toys of various shapes, sizes, and textures for an infant to reach and grasp. Encourage an infant to adjust his/her grip on the toy.

Manipulating

- Provide small toys and a plastic container in an interest area for an infant to practice letting go of objects. If an infant likes balls, he/she might enjoy dropping a ball into a bucket. Draw attention to the sound of the toy when it goes into the plastic container.
- Place shakers or bells in an interest area. Invite 1–2 infants to shake the instruments with you.
- Offer an infant a toy that makes a sound when tapped against another toy. Demonstrate tapping the two toys together. Invite the infant to tap the toys. Show enthusiasm for the infant's efforts. Sing an upbeat song while the infant taps the toys together.
- Sing fun songs with hand motions, and invite an infant to imitate your motions. Make up your own songs and hand motions.

EXAMPLES OF OBSERVATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP PLANS

Reaching and Grasping

Child: Carlos

Observation #1 (9-19-2018): During Block 2, Option 1, Carlos laid on his tummy, lifted his head off the floor, and looked at the stacking rings spread out on the floor within his reach. He reached for the rings and grasped one. Carlos got one ring right to his mouth!

Observation #2 (9-20-2018): During play time, Carlos looked at the toys hanging from the infant activity gym. Today when the staff member laid Carlos on his back on the pad under the infant activity gym, he looked at the dangling toys, swiped at two of the dangling toys, and kicked his feet. His feet touched the toys and caused them to move. He reached up and got hold of the hanging rattle. He held onto the rattle for a few seconds.

Observation #3 (9-26-2018): During Block 2, Option 1, Carlos laid on his back looking up at the staff member showing him one stacking ring. Carlos looked at the ring for several seconds and reached for it. Carlos held the ring and put it to his mouth. He became interested in a second ring when the staff member shook the ring with little up and down movements. Carlos let go of the first ring and reached for the next ring. He got a tight hold on the second ring and moved it slightly. Carlos remained interested in holding the ring for a few moments before letting it go.

Summary: Carlos is reaching for interesting toys placed within his reach. In one of my three observations, he reached for a toy and moved it to his mouth. At tummy time he held his head up to look at toys. Carlos kicked and swiped at the hanging toys of the infant gym when placed on his back. In a repeated activity, Carlos focused on one ring and then another. He was able to reach, hold, and let go of two rings shown to him by a staff member.

Follow-Up Plan: Continue to offer Carlos time on his tummy and on his back with small toys he can reach. Use toys of interest to Carlos. Talk with Carlos about how he is reaching for things. Show excitement when he grasps a toy.

Portfolio Example: Reaching is an important motor skill that we actively promote in our program. In three different observations of Carlos's progress with reaching, he reached for toys that were placed near him. Carlos was in different situations (on back, on tummy) in two of the observations. We are continuing to provide Carlos with different opportunities to practice his reaching.

Guide for Observing and Individualizing

Child: Imani

Observation #1 (9-20-2018): During Block 2, Option 2, Imani sat without support on the blue mat. She was really interested in playing a game with the stacking rings. Imani took the red ring offered by a staff member and held it tightly. She enjoyed waving it up and down. Imani dropped the ring when she saw a yellow ring. She reached both hands toward the larger yellow ring and held it with one hand. She repeated waving it up and down while smiling.

Observation #2 (9-21-2018): During a regular play time, Imani crawled to a small pail filled with the stacking rings. She sat next to the pail and took the rings out one by one, shaking each one before dropping it on the floor. She reached with one hand.

Observation #3 (9-26-2018): During Block 2, Option 3, Imani crawled over to a staff member and sat facing her. Imani was interested in a cylinder-shaped toy with rings on it. She reached toward the toy and grasped it with one hand, above the movable rings. She began to wave the toy and then dropped it. Imani looked at the toy and picked it up by the end using one hand. She put the end of the toy to her mouth for a moment. Imani placed her other hand on the opposite end and moved the toy up and down. She smiled when she heard the clicking sound she created by shaking the toy.

Summary: Imani shows a strong interest in exploring toys in our room, such as removing stacking rings one-by-one from a small pail. In two of my observations, she tended to use one hand for reaching. In my most recent observation, she used both hands to move a cylinder rattle up and down. Imani shakes little toys and often puts them in her mouth to explore.

Follow-Up Plan: Continue to provide interesting objects for Imani to reach and hold. Place a variety of toys in containers for Imani to discover. Repeat Block 2, Option 3 with the cylinder and with other shapes. Provide toys, such as the cylinder rattle, and verbal encouragement for Imani to use both hands to grasp and play with a toy.

Portfolio Example: Imani uses reaching and grasping as a way to independently explore toys in the classroom and during activities with staff members. In two observations of Imani's reaching, she used one hand for grasping and shaking toys. In a third observation, Imani used two hands to manipulate a toy. We will continue to provide a variety of opportunities for Imani to reach, grasp, and manipulate play materials. We will include opportunities for Imani to use both hands to grasp and play with a toy.

Endnotes

1 The categories and behaviors to observe are informed by the following sources: Adolph, K E., & Berger, S. E. (2011). Physical and motor development. In M. H. Bornstein & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Developmental science: Advanced textbook, 6th ed.* (pp. 241–302). New York: Psychology Press; Bricker, D., Capt, B., & Pretti-Frontczak, K. (2002). *Assessment, evaluation, and programming system for infants and children, 2nd ed., Vol. 2: Test, birth to three years and three to six years*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.; Folio, M. R., & Fewell, R. R. (2002) Peabody motor development chart. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, Inc.

ELM Snapshot of Child Progress: Birth–12 Months

Child: *C.W.* **Classroom:** *Green* **Staff:** *M.P.* **Period:** *Sept. 4, 2018* **to** *Aug. 30, 2019*

Foundation Skill	Observed (dates)	Follow-Up Learning Plan
Communication/Language		
Receptive language (begins Block 1)		
Responds to an adult's words	*Oct. 22, 24*	*Make sure CW is looking at or can easily see our face when we talk.*
Aware of the meaning of several words		
Expressive language (begins Block 1)		
Uses coos, babbles, cries to communicate with caregiver	*May 20, 23*	*Support babbles and word-like utterances during feeding.*
Awareness of Differences in Sounds (begins Block 3)		
Shows interest in different kinds of sounds		
Imitates a sound made by caregiver or peer	*July 22, 23*	*Make silly sound CW can imitate. Change the sound after he imitates 2–3 times.*
Cognitive		
Object inquiry (begins Block 1)		
Uses 1 or more senses to explore an object(s)		
Uses a simple action to make something happen with an object	*Feb. 19, 21*	*Offer different pop-up toys.*
Problem-solving (begins Block 3)		
Selects a toy to play with from several toy options	*Nov. 19, 20*	*Continue to provide 2 toys of interest for CW to look at, play with.*
Shows signs of object permanence	*Mar. 18, 20*	*Repeat Block 14, Cog. (hiding toy)*
Self-Regulation		
Self-control (begins Block 2)		
Shows early signs of calming down		
Concentration (begins Block 1)		
Visually attentive to an object or person	*Jan. 28, 30*	*Repeat Block 10, Self-Reg. (facial expressions)*
Executive function (begins Block 3)		
Shows early signs of persisting in a goal-directed activity		
Remembers location of a hidden object		

ELM Snapshot of Child Progress: Birth–12 Months continued

Child: *C.W.* **Classroom:** *Green* **Staff:** *M.P.* **Period:** *Sept. 4, 2018* **to** *Aug. 30, 2019*

Foundation Skill	Observed (dates)	Follow-Up Learning Plan
Social-Emotional		
Social interaction skills (begins Block 1)		
Initiates and/or responds to communication with a trusted caregiver		
Participates in back-and-forth exchanges with a trusted caregiver	*Dec. 17, 19*	*Use CW's favorite toy truck in back-and-forth play.*
Physical/Health		
Gross motor development (begins Block 1)		
Rolls from stomach to back, back to stomach	*Feb. 20, 21*	*Offer more practice in back-to-stomach rolling (Block 6, P/H).*
Lifts head while on tummy		
Engages in early creeping, crawling, or walking	*Aug. 21, 23*	*Provide low barrier for CW to crawl around.*
Fine motor development (begins Block 2)		
Reaches with arm for an object or caregiver hand	*Sep. 19, 20, 26*	*Offer toys of interest CW can reach during tummy time and on his back.*
Grasps an object or caregiver hand		
Manipulates an object	*Apr. 22, 25*	*Play with ball with holes to practice finger use.*

ELM Activity Observation Checklist: Birth–36 Months

Classroom: *Blue* **Staff:** *S.K.* **Date:** *12-4-2018* **Begin/End Time:** *9:00–10:00*

Activity: *Block 9, Cognitive, Option 1 (IG)* **Observer:** *B.B.*

Observe one ELM activity (informal gathering or one-to-one activity). Use the activity description in the ELM Curriculum as a reference for the observation. Use one Checklist form for each ELM activity you observe. Observe at least 15 minutes of time devoted to child-initiated activities before or after the activity.

Planning and Preparation	**N/A**	**No**	**Partial**	**Yes**
1. Materials used in the activity were secured in advance of the session and fully available in the activity space.	☐	☐	☐	☑
2. The physical space for the activity was arranged in advance and included only materials that were part of the activity (example: no potential distractions of unrelated toys).	☐	☐	☐	☑
3. The caregiver's use of the ELM activity suggested advance planning and preparation had been done. Evidence might include: activity notes (sometimes on a 3 x 5 card) had been prepared by the caregiver; the caregiver sang a song without hesitation; the caregiver's book sharing suggested familiarity with the book.	☐	☐	☐	☑

Notes:

Book sharing occurred on rug with no distracting toys. S.K. was well prepared.

ELM Activity Use (One-to-One or Informal Gathering)	**N/A**	**No**	**Partial**	**Yes**
4. The caregiver used an appealing and appropriate invitation to join the activity.	☐	☐	☐	☑
5. The caregiver gave full attention to the child(ren) during the entire activity with his/her eyes, attentive listening, words, use of the child(ren)'s name, and facial expressions.	☐	☐	☑	☐
6. The caregiver spoke slowly, distinctly, repeated key words or phrases, and frequently used pointing and/or gestures to complement words.	☐	☐	☐	☑

Notes:

4. Walked around room with a teddy bear and used a teddy bear voice to invite toddlers to session.
5. Responded to some toddler comments and pointing to pictures. Facial expressions matched story.
6. Read at a pace toddlers seemed to like. Pointed to clothing items in book.

ELM Activity Observation Checklist: Birth–36 Months continued

ELM Activity Use (One-to-One or Informal Gathering)	N/A	No	Partial	Yes
7. The caregiver was consistently in tune with the child(ren)'s actions and responses. Examples: described an action, accomplishment, or object held or manipulated by the child(ren); acknowledged and responded to the child(ren)'s actions or utterances in a way that invited more child(ren) participation supporting a serve-and-return interaction.	☐	☐	☑	☐
8. The caregiver attempted to connect the content of the activity, including a book sharing, to a child(ren)'s experiences and/or current understandings.	☐	☑	☐	☐
9. The caregiver used an appropriate range of strategies to support learning. Examples: encouraged the child(ren) to talk, point, or move part of his/her body; encouraged persistence or effort; offered specific feedback; demonstrated a desired behavior or action; provided information; and paused at appropriate points.	☐	☐	☑	☐
10. The activity seemed well matched to the child(ren)'s abilities, with the caregiver making adaptations in advance of and/or during the activity to facilitate participation.	☐	☐	☐	☑
11. The activity's goals and content were addressed during all or nearly all of the session (no significant "drift").	☐	☑	☐	☐

Notes:

7. Toddler pointed to her shirt when shirt was featured in book. S.K. did not acknowledge.
8. Did not ask toddlers whether they were wearing the clothing items featured in book. Did not point to socks in introducing book as suggested. Did not ask or talk about part of body used for different clothing.
9. Mostly read book and pointed to things in book. Used book tabs to build enthusiasm about clothing shown on next page. S.K. did not ask what clothing might be on next page and some toddlers offered ideas a few times. Book sharing could be more interactive.
10. Kids seemed interested in teddy bear's clothes.
11. Did not pursue some goals: ask/talk about clothing, where and when clothing is worn.

ELM Activity Observation Checklist: Birth–36 Months continued

ELM Activity Use (One-to-One or Informal Gathering)	**N/A**	**No**	**Partial**	**Yes**
12. During a book sharing, the caregiver (a) used his/her own words to describe pictures and supplement book text; (b) pointed to specific aspects of pictures as part of describing a picture; (c) acknowledged a child(ren)'s utterances and/or pointing; (d) spent more time on pages/ pictures that appeared to be of particular interest to the child(ren); (e) asked questions about the book; and (f) in a one-to-one session, encouraged the child to help manage the book, such as turn pages or hold the book, as appropriate.	☐	☐	☑	☐
13. During an informal gathering, the caregiver positively acknowledged a child(ren)'s departures and/or returns to the gathering	☑	☐	☐	☐

Notes:

12. Used own words to build excitement about clothing shown on next page. Focused on S.K.'s ideas, not toddlers' ideas. Did not ask questions.
13. No child left gathering.

Child-initiated Activities	**N/A**	**No**	**Partial**	**Yes**
14. The caregiver supported a child(ren)'s explorations by describing actions and/or materials and providing access to materials without prescribing what to do.	☐	☐	☐	☑
15. The caregiver remained connected to a child(ren)'s pursuits by watching and commenting, as appropriate, in ways that supported the child(ren)'s ideas and let the child(ren) know the caregiver was interested and available.	☐	☐	☑	☐
16. Some or all of the caregiver's comments and actions focused on individual children and included use of the child's name.	☐	☑	☐	☐

Notes:

14. Described a child's efforts to dress teddy bear. Said name of clothing.
15. Stayed in area but talked with other staff part of time.
16. Did not use name of child.