



# Early Learning Guidelines

In 2002, the President's *Good Start, Grow Smart* early learning initiative (GSGS) asked States to develop voluntary guidelines on literacy, language, pre-reading skills, and numeracy activities for children ages 3 to 5 that align with State K-12 standards. In the last several years, nearly every State has developed voluntary early learning guidelines (ELGs) for preschool children. Recognizing the value of a standards based approach to early care and education for all children, several States and Territories have begun to develop ELGs for children birth to three.

States and Territories are at varying stages of the development process—convening task forces or work groups to begin discussions, reviewing draft guidelines, or evaluating and revising existing ones. As of April 2006, seventeen States and one Territory had draft or final ELGs for infants and toddlers. Many additional States have also indicated that they are developing ELGs for infants and toddlers, but do not yet have draft documents available for public review. Although there are similarities in the process of developing ELGs for all children, when creating ELGs for children birth to three, it is important to take into account the uniqueness of the infant and toddler period of development.

## Special Considerations in Developing ELGs for Infants and Toddlers<sup>1</sup>

Infant and toddler guidelines need to be clear and meaningful so caregivers and parents can actively support and guide development and learning in a variety of settings—including centers, family child care homes, and in care provided by family, friends, or neighbors. The guidelines should consider the uniqueness of infant and toddler development, the power of relationships as a primary learning context during this period, and the system that supports caregivers to appropriately use the ELGs in their practice.

- Infant and Toddler Development

Infant and toddler guidelines reflect the foundations of learning that are being established as the brain develops from birth to age three. During this time, infants and toddlers are developing the basic mental processes of learning: the ability to focus, to maintain attention, to persist in their efforts through frustration, to communicate and discern language, and to recognize the basic patterns of human life. The content of ELGs reflect these foundations for all later learning, and also align with 3 to 5-year-old and/or K-2 early learning standards.

These guidelines should reflect the progression of learning in the first three years, and include the subtle signs of learning in infancy. Recent research has provided new insights into the critical role adults play in infant and toddler learning. Guidelines help caregivers recognize focused attention, engagement in learning, and mastery motivation as readily as they recognize crawling or first words as steps in development.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "Considerations for Developing Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers," Sandra Petersen, National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative, and Lori Connors-Tadros, National Child Care Information Center, 2005

- The Importance of Relationships

Infants and toddlers learn within the context of the relationships and environments provided by the adults in their lives. ELGs for infants and toddlers assist caregivers in understanding the effects of reciprocal interactions, observations, and provisions of a stimulating and engaging environment on the development of children's learning.

- Opportunities for Caregiver Knowledge and Skill Development

Those developing ELGs should consider what opportunities and incentives the early care and education system provides for caregivers to gain skills and knowledge about infants and toddlers. For example, opportunities for caregivers to learn how to implement the guidelines are part of a coherent system leading to Infant/Toddler Credentials, supported on-site by infant/toddler specialists, and recognized within States' career lattices or quality rating systems. The unique skills of infant and toddler caregivers are acknowledged as a particular aspect of the field's growing professionalism.

## Considerations for Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs

Children develop at varying paces, especially in the first three years of life. This variability may be more pronounced for children with special needs. Accordingly, some States and Territories have begun to consider how ELGs can be inclusive of infants and toddlers with special needs.

Guidelines that are inclusive of children with special needs focus on describing the developmental process and what children can do at each stage, allow for individualization in how achievement is described and measured, and link caregivers to information and resources.<sup>2</sup>

- A Focus on What Children Can Do

All children can experience success in achieving developmental standards and caregivers should strive to recognize these successes. Caregivers can use ELGs as a guide to support children with special needs in moving from where they are now to the next step on the developmental continuum. They can focus more on the developmental *process* described in the ELGs, and on achievement to the fullest extent possible by the child with special needs.

- Individualization

Infant/toddler care is often individualized so that caregivers follow children's leads and respect their natural sleeping and eating rhythms. Individualization can be further expanded to meet the needs of children with special needs. For example, a standard may be adapted so that a child can achieve it within the context of his abilities, or the child may show achievement of a standard in his own special way. Methods of assessing progress may also be individualized.

- Examples and Resources to Inform Caregivers

Adaptations and modifications to include children with special needs can vary dramatically depending on the child and the special need. ELGs for infants and toddlers include examples of how standards can be adapted for a child with special needs. Additionally, resources and links to the early intervention system and its resources are provided so that the caregiver knows where to turn for support in making adaptations.

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<sup>2</sup> These three criteria for inclusive ELGs for infants and toddlers represent a summary of State efforts to address children with special needs in their ELGs. Other strategies to make ELGs inclusive of children with special needs may exist.

## Early Learning Guidelines and Program Standards

ELGs are research-based, measurable expectations about what children should know (understand) and do (competencies and skills) in different domains of learning.<sup>3</sup> ELGs are different from program standards, which are expectations about the characteristics or qualities of the settings where children are cared for. ELGs may be developed as one component of Program Standards—as the child outcomes within a broader set of expectations related to things such as the physical environment and caregiver behavior—but the terms describe very different things and should not be used interchangeably. Program standards are not new to the field—both licensing regulations and accreditation standards are examples of Program Standards.

Some States have included ELGs (child outcomes) within frameworks that are broader than Program Standards. The *Georgia Outcome and Indicator Framework*, for example, includes indicators for children, families, communities (services and access to them), and systems capacity (which services are linked and how they function as a system).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, California's *Desired Results* include outcomes for children as well as for their families.<sup>5</sup>

## State and Territory Early Learning Guidelines

The following list includes early learning guidelines for infants and toddlers identified as of April 2006. Some States are currently in the process of developing or revising their guidelines, therefore some of the guidelines included below are in draft form. A link to the guidelines is provided if they are available on the Internet; otherwise, contact information for the associated agency and/or individual is provided for readers who are interested in obtaining more information.

### Arkansas

*Arkansas Framework for Infant and Toddler Care* (Final/July 2002)

Arkansas Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education

Available at <http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/bench.pdf>

### California

*Desired Results for Children and Families (Birth to 13)* (In Revision)

California Department of Education, Child Development Division

For information contact Barbara Metzruk, Child Development Specialist

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### Connecticut

*Connecticut's Guidelines for the Development of Early Learning for Infants and Toddlers* (Draft/April 2005)

Connecticut Department of Social Services

Available at <http://www.wheelerclinic.org/children/ELGdraft2forweb.pdf>

### Delaware

*Delaware Infant and Toddler Early Learning Foundations: A Curriculum Framework* (Final/April 2006)

Delaware Department of Education

Available at [http://www.doe.k12.de.us/early\\_childhood/](http://www.doe.k12.de.us/early_childhood/)

<sup>3</sup> *Good Start, Grow Smart: The President's Early Childhood Initiative*, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/earlychildhood/toc.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://cfusion.sph.emory.edu/GAChildren/Welcome.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>

Florida

*Florida Birth to Three Learning and Developmental Standards* (Final/October 2004)

Florida Partnership for School Readiness

Available at [http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/downloads/pdf/birth\\_to\\_3book.pdf](http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/downloads/pdf/birth_to_3book.pdf)

Georgia

*Growing Smart and Healthy Babies: Voluntary guidelines for measuring the quality of infant and toddler care* (Final/September 1999)

Georgia Department of Human Resources, Office of Regulatory Services, Child Care Licensing Section

Available at <http://health.state.ga.us/pdfs/familyhealth/hccg/growinghealthysmart.0103.pdf>

Guam

*Guam's Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers Birth to 36 Months* (Draft/February 2005)

Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services

For information contact Julie Celeste, Social Services

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Iowa

*Iowa Early Learning Standards* (Final/September 2005)

Iowa Department of Education & Iowa Department of Human Services

Available at [http://www.iowachildnetwork.org/new\\_page\\_5.htm](http://www.iowachildnetwork.org/new_page_5.htm)

Kentucky

*Building a Strong Foundation for School Success: Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards* (Final/January 2003)

Kentucky Department of Education

Available at

[http://www.education.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/ettup6x6g5bs55f6v6satg4tjwgrk2lrpjofozoh37uuft47tena3zqrwgugfz\\_sahpqltv3zv7fkvhdr4x2leyrk6afe/FinalFullVersionKYECS121803.pdf](http://www.education.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/ettup6x6g5bs55f6v6satg4tjwgrk2lrpjofozoh37uuft47tena3zqrwgugfz_sahpqltv3zv7fkvhdr4x2leyrk6afe/FinalFullVersionKYECS121803.pdf)

Louisiana

*Louisiana Standards for Infants and Toddlers* (Draft/June 2003)

Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, Child Care Assistance Program

Available at <http://www.dss.state.la.us/documents/OFS/StandardsforInfantsandToddlers.pdf>

Maine

*Maine's Infant Toddler Early Learning Guidelines* (First Draft/December 2005)

Maine Department of Human Services, Office of Child Care and Head Start

For copy contact Carolyn Drugge, CCDF Administrator

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Maryland

*Guidelines for Healthy Child Development and Care for Young Children (Birth – Three Years of Age)* (Final/2004)

Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Development, Office of Child Care

Available at <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/cca/pdfs/guidechild.pdf>

Minnesota

*Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to 3* (Final/December 2004)

Minnesota Department of Human Services

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## Nebraska

*Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages Birth to Three* (Final/January 2006)

Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood & Nebraska Health and Human Services System

Available at [http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ech/ELGuidelines/ELG\\_IT.pdf](http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ech/ELGuidelines/ELG_IT.pdf)

## New Hampshire

*New Hampshire Early Learning Guidelines (Birth to Five)* (Final/October 2005)

NH Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families, Child Development Bureau

Available at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/DHHS/CDB/LIBRARY/Policy-Guideline/learning-guidelines.htm>

## Ohio

*Ohio's Infant and Toddler Guidelines, Early Experiences Last a Lifetime* (Final/March 2006)

OH Department of Education, OH Department of Health, OH Department of Job and Family Services & OH CCR&R Association

Available at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/InfantToddler.pdf>

Poster of the guidelines available at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/Posters.pdf>

## Tennessee

*Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (Birth to Five)* (Final/August 2004)

TN Department of Education, TN Department of Health, TN Department of Human Services & TN Head Start State Collaboration Office

Available at <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/cistandards2001/earlychildhood/ciearlychidcover.htm>

## Washington

*Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks (Birth to Kindergarten Entry)* (Final/2005)

Office of the Governor & Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

Available at <http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/EarlyLearningBenchmarks.pdf>

*The examples in this fact sheet are provided for informational purposes and are not endorsed or recommended by the National Infant and Toddler Child Care Initiative or by the Child Care Bureau. The information presented is a snapshot of current activity related to ELGs for infants and toddlers based on information collected by the Initiative in its work with States and Territories and a review of the FY04-05 CCDF State Plans. This information may not represent all existing efforts.*

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