



School Readiness Goals for Infants and Toddlers in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs: Examples from the Early Head Start National Resource Center

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 requires programs to address and strengthen school readiness for all of the children they serve, ages birth to five. The Act and Head Start Program Performance Standard 1307 define school readiness goals in this way:

§ 1307.2 *School readiness goals* mean the expectations of children's status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve their readiness for kindergarten.

In very broad terms, the Office of Head Start's definition of school readiness is that "children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children".¹ Head Start leaders must identify the knowledge and skills children demonstrate when they are *school ready*. A clear articulation of these goals enables Head Start staff and families to choose and implement the most effective curriculum, and assessments.

According to § 1307.3(b)(1)(i) and (ii), Head Start programs serving infants and toddlers are required to establish program goals for improving school readiness of children that:

- Appropriately reflect the ages of children participating in the program;
- Align with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework (HSCDELFF) in the five essential domains –
 - Social and Emotional Development
 - Language Development and Literacy
 - Approaches Toward Learning
 - Cognition and General Knowledge
 - Physical Well-Being and Motor Development
- Align with State early learning guidelines; and
- Align with the requirements and expectations of the schools, as they apply to infants and toddlers.



What Is Unique About School Readiness for Infants and Toddlers?

Babies are born ready to learn. Adults encourage this capacity by providing very young children with the experiences and nurturing relationships they need. This ensures that they will develop the skills that are related to their later success in school and in life.ⁱⁱ

A large body of research on brain development and how infants learn clearly identifies the importance of learning in the context of relationships. The social and emotional development of young children and the nature of their relationships and attachments are critical to their development. It is through these relationships and interactions with families and other adults that infants and toddlers learn and develop.

The foundations for school readiness begin in pregnancy and continue for the first three years. For infants and toddlers, school readiness refers to the developing capacity of children to self-regulate; develop close, secure personal relationships with adults and peers; demonstrate curiosity in, pay attention to and explore people and objects in the environment; demonstrate a sense of self-confidence; and communicate effectively. This developing capacity depends on the child having good health and receiving proper nutrition. And it all happens within the context of close, nurturing, culturally responsive relationships with parents, caregivers, extended family, and community.

Effective school readiness goals for infants and toddlers reflect an understanding and acknowledgment of:

- The rapid period of growth and development that occurs during the infant and toddler years;
- The critical nature of relationships with responsive, caring adults;
 - These relationships help to mediate experiences for infants and toddlers. Adults in ongoing, meaningful relationships with very young children help to manage, or regulate the child's reactions; help the child to feel safe exploring; provide rich language experiences; encourage movement and handling of materials; help the child to learn the beliefs and values of the culture; and provide engaging play environments.
- The critical impact of brain development occurring prenatally and during the infant and toddler years on all later learning;
 - Early experiences, supported by loving adults, are essential to the brain developing the healthy connections needed for learning.
- The foundational nature of developing skills, knowledge, and attitudes in the infant and toddler years necessary for success in school and for later learning and life; and
- The fact that development and learning are rooted in culture and supported by the family.
 - The child's language/s, knowledge, traditions, and family expectations are the primary influences on development.

The pathway of development toward any goal may look different at different times during the first three years of life. For example, a goal for motor development might be "By age three, children are able to use their body and hands to achieve their goals." Young infants may demonstrate progress toward that goal by being able to lift their head, roll over, and hold (but not let go of) a small toy. Older infants may



demonstrate progress by sitting unassisted, crawling, and handling toys, such as stack rings, with intention. Toddlers may demonstrate progress by walking (unsteadily at first), crouching and standing, and handling blocks, markers, and books.

Programs should prioritize the use of home language with very young children. They should be intentional in how the home language is used and when English is introduced. Programs should strive to hire staff who speak the language/s of the families and children. When this is not possible, supports should be in place to maximize experiences of infants and toddlers that are culturally and linguistically consistent. Programs should also have a written plan that addresses the language approach for supporting children who are dual language learners. The plan should include how home language is used and when English can be introduced.





Determining School Readiness Goals for Infants and Toddlers

To assist Head Start and Early Head Start programs in their efforts to meet the requirement of § 1307, the Office of Head Start outlines four **School Readiness Action Steps**:ⁱⁱⁱ

1. Establish goals for improving school readiness across domains;
2. Create and implement an action plan for achieving the established school readiness goals;
3. Assess child progress on an ongoing basis and aggregate and analyze data at multiple times throughout the year; and
4. Examine data for patterns of progress for groups of children in order to revise, or develop and implement plans for program improvement.

This document is intended to support action step 1 by providing examples of school readiness goals for infants and toddlers related to the five essential domains of the **Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework**.^{iv}

These examples of goals are aligned with the **School Readiness Goals for Preschool Children in Head Start Programs: Examples from the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning** and incorporate the unique features of infant and toddler development.^v Like the *School Readiness Goals for Preschool Children in Head Start Programs*, these are broad statements intended to demonstrate progress towards the development of skills and competencies needed for later success in school.

The goals are applicable to infants and toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs in all program options. While these goals do not represent the full breadth of growth and development occurring during the first three years of life, they offer examples of what goals in the five domains might look like for a young infant, older infant, and toddler. Because age groupings vary across curricula, assessment tools, and early learning guidelines, programs may choose to use the age grouping definitions with which they are most familiar. As programs develop goals, it is important to be aware that state early learning guidelines, assessment tools, and curricula may have differing definitions of goals as well as benchmarks and indicators. The goals included here offer a broad range, but are not meant to typify the number of goals a program develops.

Because of the integral aspect of the parent and family influence on infant and toddler development and learning, programs are highly encouraged to align their goals for infants and toddlers with the **Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework: Promoting Family Engagement and School Readiness from Prenatal to Age 8**.^{vi}



Examples of Goal Statements

Social and Emotional Development Goals for Infants and Toddlers

- Goal 1:** Children will develop and engage in positive relationships and interactions with adults.
- Goal 2:** Children will begin to develop personal relationships with peers.
- Goal 3:** Children will begin to develop and demonstrate control over some of their feelings and behaviors (self-regulation).
- Goal 4:** Children will begin to learn and internalize rules, routines, and directions.
- Goal 5:** Children will begin to develop and demonstrate a positive sense of self, competence, and an identity that is rooted in their family and culture.

Goal 1

Children will develop and engage in positive relationships and interactions with adults.

For young infants, this includes turning to adults for security and comforting, play, information, and language; and watching adults to judge their emotional state.

For older infants, this includes relationships with adults becoming more multifaceted, including using the adult to help accomplish the child's goals.

For toddlers, this includes establishing at least one on-going, meaningful attachment relationship with an adult. It also includes understanding that others may have beliefs, intentions, and desires that differ from their own.

Goal 2

Children will begin to develop personal relationships with peers.

For young infants, this includes showing interest in peers, especially in their emotional expressions.

For older infants, this includes actively demonstrating interest in peers, e.g., offering toys, following, touching, and babbling to them.

For toddlers, this includes developing friendships over time; comforting a friend who is unhappy; playing with peers for extended periods of time; carrying on conversations; laughing together; and missing a peer who is absent.

Goal 3

Children will begin to develop and demonstrate control over some of their feelings and behaviors (self-regulation).

For young infants, this includes allowing a trusted adult to help them calm with words and touch, along with self-soothing efforts such as finger-sucking or holding a comforting toy.

For older infants, this includes sometimes being able to calm with thumb sucking or a comforting toy, sometimes with an adult's support. As they near 18 months, they begin to lose some control and may tantrum when distressed.



For toddlers, this includes trying to control their actions, perhaps by saying “No, no” as they throw toys. Toddlers may take a blanket to a quiet area and rest when distressed. They will often seek a familiar adult for comfort.

Goal 4

Children will begin to learn and internalize rules, routines, and directions.

For young infants, this includes recognizing and anticipating daily routines, e.g., anticipating eating when an adult brings a bottle out or expecting an adult to come when they cry out after a nap.

For older infants, this includes anticipating and participating in home and classroom routines and following rules when directed, such as clearing dishes from the table after meals, walking to the changing table for a diaper change, and brushing teeth after eating.

For toddlers, this includes learning and understanding rules but not always having the self-regulation to follow them. It also includes repeating rules to others and trying to learn the rules of their society. Toddlers will often test to see if a rule will be enforced.

Goal 5

Children will begin to develop and demonstrate a positive sense of self, competence, and an identity that is rooted in their family and culture.

For young infants, this includes showing interest in their bodies and the many different things they are able to do, such as watching and using their hands, moving with purpose, self-feeding finger foods, and manipulating toys and materials effectively.

For older infants, this includes completing their own goal-directed activity and recognizing their own accomplishments while learning the rules and values of their family and culture, such as being purposeful in their use of toys and materials, smiling or laughing as they move from crawling to walking, learning new words, demonstrating interest in other children (e.g., spontaneously hugging another child, calling another child “friend”), and showing care and cooperation (e.g., pat a child who is crying on the back, help put toys away).

For toddlers, this includes showing awareness of their own thoughts, feelings, and preferences as well as those of others (e.g., use words such as *you*, *me*, *I*, *he*, *she*, and *mine*); identifying themselves and using their own name when asked; identifying gender and other basic similarities and differences between themselves and others; wanting to take care of themselves; showing completed projects to an adult; and seeking help from an adult after trying something new or challenging.



Examples of Goal Statements

Approaches Toward Learning Goals for Infants and Toddlers

Goal 1: Children will demonstrate interest, curiosity, and eagerness in exploring the world around them.

Goal 2: Children will demonstrate persistence in learning and discovery.

Goal 3: Children will learn and use words to describe what they are thinking and doing.

Goal 1

Children will demonstrate interest, curiosity, and eagerness in exploring the world around them.

For young infants, this includes being awake and alert for increasing amounts of time and using different actions and modalities in exploring objects or interacting with people.

For older infants, this includes remembering where to find favorite toys or books if they are always kept in the same place; and actively exploring interactions with other people, a variety of materials in the environment, and their own changing physical capacities.

For toddlers, this includes being flexible in trying out different solutions to problems; awareness of change; active exploration; asking questions; and the beginning of symbolic play.

Goal 2

Children will demonstrate persistence in learning and discovery.

For young infants, this includes regulating and prolonging attention with the support of a responsive adult.

For older infants, this includes maintaining interest in interactions or exploration during waking hours, such as sitting on an adult's lap and listening to all of a simple book.

For toddlers, this includes maintaining attention long enough to complete activities and experiences that interest them, such as completing a simple puzzle, listening to an entire story, building a block structure, spending time at a playdough table, and playing pretend games.

Goal 3

Children will learn and use words to describe what they are thinking and doing.

For young infants, this includes having ongoing, meaningful relationships with adults who provide a rich language environment.

For older infants, this includes learning the names of objects and actions from an involved adult and beginning to name some objects and actions they are doing.

For toddlers, this includes using language to ask for help, to communicate during pretend play, and to converse with others about what they are doing.



Examples of Goal Statements

Language and Literacy Development Goals for Infants and Toddlers

- Goal 1:** Children will demonstrate receptive and expressive language skills and communication strategies in their home language/s (may be English or other language/s).
- Goal 2:** Children will understand and begin to use oral language for conversation and communication.
- Goal 3:** Children will hear and distinguish the sounds and rhythms of language.
- Goal 4:** Children will begin to learn and demonstrate how print works.
- Goal 5:** Children will engage with stories and books.

Goal 1

Children will demonstrate receptive and expressive language skills and communication strategies in their home language/s (may be English or other language/s).

For young infants, this includes looking at a person who is speaking; enjoying an adult's singing, laughing, and talking; and participating in turn-taking conversations with adults through facial expressions, gestures, cooing, babbling, and signing.

For older infants, this includes incorporating an increasing number of non-verbal communications, such as pointing, head turning, hand motions; beginning to use proto words (such as wa-wa for water); and making the transition to spoken language, using the names of objects, activities, and friends.

For toddlers, this includes a "language explosion," moving from two-word sentences to recounting events.

Goal 2

Children will understand and begin to use oral language for conversation and communication.

For young infants, this includes developing the reciprocal pattern of conversation by taking turns with an adult who is talking with them.

For older infants, this includes using language or language-like sounds in "conversations" with adults and friends and using one or two words to communicate.

For toddlers, this includes understanding and following directions, such as "Bring your coat and your hat"; remembering words to songs and fingerplays; conversing with friends; using language to describe an event (seen or imagined) and to plan or negotiate play; and add *ing* to a verb or *s* to a noun.

Goal 3

Children will hear and distinguish the sounds and rhythms of language.

For young infants, this includes attending to the languages spoken around them as they develop a cognitive map of the sounds of these languages.

For older infants, this includes enjoying playing with language-like sounds.

For toddlers, this includes making language sound generalizations, such as using the "s" sound for plurals and creating words like *mouses*; and enjoying rhymes.



Goal 4

Children will begin to learn and demonstrate how print works.

For young infants, this includes looking at photos as an adult describes them; exploring books by mouthing, chewing, patting, and banging; and holding a book and trying to turn the pages.

For older infants, this includes making sounds when looking at pictures in books (e.g., saying “a, a” when looking at a picture of a cat); turning pages of a book, sometimes turning more than one at a time; recognizing a favorite book by its cover; scribbling with a crayon; and pretending to read environmental print (e.g., print on a cereal box).

For toddlers, this includes using writing instruments; dictating words and watching an adult write them down; and recognizing familiar logos.

Goal 5

Children will engage with stories and books.

For young infants, this includes looking at pictures in a book; responding to an adult’s excited voice when reading a story; and looking at books every day.

For older infants, this includes pointing to pictures when named by an adult. Older infants may look at books on their own.

For toddlers, this includes “reading” a familiar story to friends or stuffed animals; handling books; and listening to longer stories and talking about the characters.





Examples of Goal Statements

Cognition and General Knowledge Goals for Infants and Toddlers

- Goal 1:** Children will learn and begin to use math concepts during daily routines and experiences.
- Goal 2:** Children will use all of their senses to investigate their environment to discover what objects and people do, how things work, and how they can make things happen.
- Goal 3:** Children will begin to develop and demonstrate the ability to remember and connect new and known experiences and information.

Goal 1

Children will learn and begin to use math concepts during daily routines and experiences.

For young infants, this includes recognizing the difference in number of small sets of objects, such as being surprised when watching two objects dropped into a box but finding only one object in the box.

For older infants, this includes using shape sorting boxes; using words such as *big*, *little*, *more* and *one*, *two*, *three*; and noticing the size, shape, and color of objects.

For toddlers, this includes sorting the circles separately from the squares, even though each comes in red, blue, and yellow; setting a plate at each chair at meal time; and understanding spatial relationships to solve problems.

Goal 2

Children will use all of their senses to investigate their environment to discover what objects and people do, how things work, and how they can make things happen.

For young infants, this includes sucking, holding, looking, touching, throwing, dropping, vigorously moving toward or away from objects and people.

For older infants, this includes categorizing, matching, and ordering some objects such as piling toy animals together; matching socks; putting red blocks together; organizing three objects from small to large with help; and using tools to solve problems.

For toddlers, this includes attending to the properties of things that cannot be seen, such as time, cause, or loved ones who are not present. They use an understanding of spatial relationships to solve problems; remember where to find their jackets or certain toys; and ask questions such as “Why?,” “When?,” and “Where?”

Goal 3

Children will begin to develop and demonstrate the ability to remember and connect new and known experiences and information.

For young infants, this includes remembering that people and objects exist even when they are out of sight (person or object permanence).



For older infants, this includes using understanding of cause and effect to predict events and solve problems, e.g., building a block tower and knocking it down; using a jack-in-the box; and dropping objects repeatedly off the side of the table.

For toddlers, this includes saying what will happen next in a familiar story; knowing the words to songs; remembering a game played the day before; and showing interest in the idea that they were small and are now growing.





Examples of Goal Statements

Physical Well-Being and Motor Development Goals for Infants and Toddlers

- Goal 1:** Children will develop control of large muscles for movement, navigation, and balance.
- Goal 2:** Children will develop control of small muscles for manipulation and exploration.
- Goal 3:** Children will learn and begin to demonstrate healthy and safe habits.

Goal 1

Children will develop control of large muscles for movement, navigation, and balance.

For young infants, this includes raising the head and body against gravity; balancing during sitting and crawling; practicing many movements with “body babbling” (apparently random movement that develops into purposeful action); and rolling, rocking, and crawling to move from place to place.

For older infants, this includes moving in a variety of ways, such as cruising, walking, and toddling; and climbing and moving from one position to another while maintaining balance and coordinating body movements.

For toddlers, this includes moving with more confidence and coordinating body movements for a purpose.

Goal 2

Children will develop control of small muscles for manipulation and exploration.

For young infants, this includes shaking objects; reaching, holding, and transferring objects from hand to hand; picking up and releasing objects; and sitting and using hands.

For older infants, this includes using hands to play with toys and tools and coordinating hand and body movements.

For toddlers, this includes using markers; building with blocks; brushing teeth (with adult help); dressing dolls; and putting a four piece puzzle together.

Goal 3

Infants and toddlers will learn and begin to demonstrate healthy and safe habits.

For young infants, the responsibility belongs to parents and other caretaking adults.

For older infants, this may include anticipating washing hands before and after eating and brushing teeth.

For toddlers, this includes dressing and undressing themselves; brushing their teeth; washing hands independently; getting a tissue for a runny nose; drinking from an open cup; learning to use the toilet; choosing a food to eat when given several nutritious choices; and trying new foods when offered.

All photos: EHS NR

ⁱ Office of Head Start, <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/sr/approach>

ⁱⁱ Rebecca Parlakian, *Before the ABCs: Promoting School Readiness in Infants and Toddlers* (Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE, 2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/Early%20Head%20Start/early-learning/curriculum/SchoolReadiness.htm>

^{iv} <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/sr/approach/cdelf>

^v <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/sr-goals-2012.pdf>

^{vi} <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/IMs/2011/pfce-framework.pdf>