

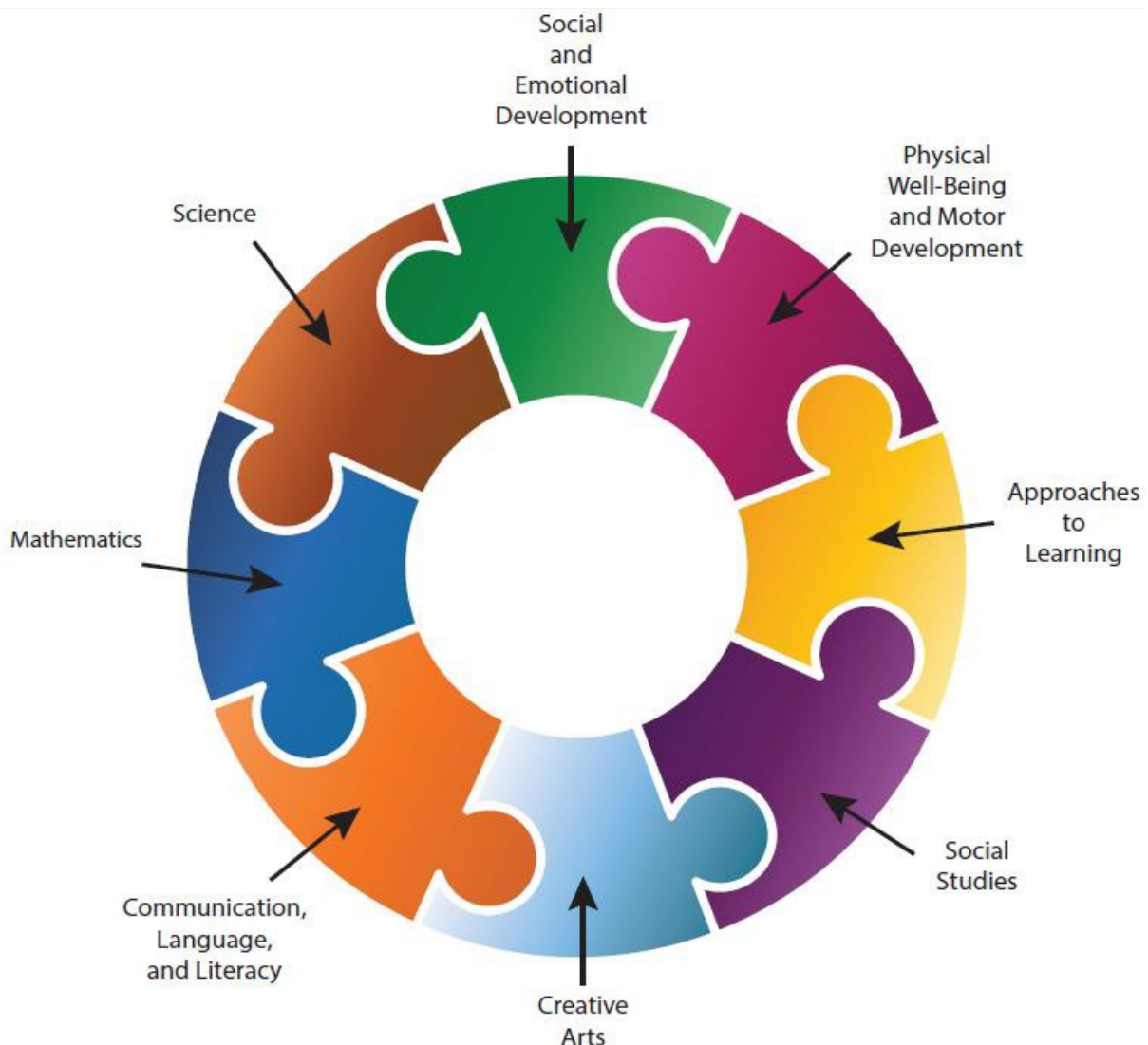
IOWA
EARLY Learning
STANDARDS



Essential Considerations

Iowa Early Learning Standards – 3rd edition

Abridged



Abridged — Essential Considerations

During this COVID-19 pandemic, many families, caregivers, and teachers are considering how to support young children’s learning. To address this question, an abridged version of the **Essential Considerations Section** of the **Iowa Early Learning Standards – 3rd ed.** is provided for quick reference. It is suggested to review the specific topical areas of *The Role of Relationships in Learning*, *The Importance of Physical and Mental Health*, *The Importance of Play*, and *The Role of Technology and Interactive Media*. Each of these topics will provide a high-level overview of important considerations for supporting young children’s development and learning. Please note, these will not tell readers what to teach but instead details to consider and pay attention to when supporting learning opportunities. Also, this document does not replace the Iowa Early Learning Standards.

For information on developmental and content areas illustrating appropriate content for young learners, please review the [Iowa Early Learning Standards – 3rd ed.](#)

The Intent of the Essential Considerations

The intent of the Iowa Early Learning Standards is to create an understanding of how children develop and learn. The standards define age appropriate expectations to provide a framework when designing developmentally appropriate teaching and learning experiences.

In 2016, the Early Childhood Iowa Professional Development Component Group developed the **Iowa Core Knowledge of Child Development** (<http://www.iowaaeyc.org/iowa-core-knowledge-of-child-development.cfm>) to assist adults with ideas to increase their knowledge and their ability to appropriately respond to children in their lives. The information reflects the principles of child development from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The following eight statements define the foundational information that all adults who have a role in a child's development – whether a child care provider, parent or guardian, “baby sitter,” grandparent, health care professional, retail checker, secretary in a business where a family may visit, or any other role as a positive adult in the life of a child (Early Childhood Iowa, 2016):

- Play is learning
- Children are influenced by their family, community, and cultural experiences
- Balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, and physical activity help children grow
- Early experiences and relationships have profound effects on brain development
- Children develop best when they have secure and positive relationships
- Children learn in a variety of ways
- All areas of development and learning are important
- Learning and development occur in a specific order, but at differing rates

Children learn from everything they experience, which impacts all areas of development at the same time. The play, learning, communication, and relationships children encounter in their first five years lay the foundation for learning throughout the rest of their lives. When children are exposed to age-appropriate learning experiences, many opportunities for play, and nurturing relationships within family and early care and education settings, they are better prepared for learning and for getting along with others when they enter school.

NAEYC defined child development and developmentally appropriate guidelines for working with young children using early childhood research and theory. Developmentally appropriate practice defines the materials, equipment, skills, and strategies necessary for quality early learning and caring experiences (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Positive relationships, meaningful experiences, play, and active hands-on use of materials help children create their own understanding of the world. Adults pay close attention to each child's individual and social needs, and then adjust situations so each child is successful in his or her own way. These practices serve as the foundation for the Iowa Early Learning Standards.

While implementing the Iowa Early Learning Standards, it is important that caring adults consider topics from developmentally appropriate practice to make decisions about children from birth through five years of age.

The Role of Relationships in Learning

Building nurturing relationships with children assists in the formation of positive attachment. Attachment is the strong emotional bond formed between a child and a caring adult who is a part of the child's everyday life. "Strong attachment relationships between children and the adults who care for them are critical to early brain development. All children need nurturing, responsive adults who they can trust to care for them as they grow and learn. If a child's needs are met, the child forms a secure attachment – a base – that creates a foundation for healthy development in early childhood and beyond. When early relationships are nurturing, individualized, responsive, and predictable, they increase the odds of desirable outcomes – building healthy brain architecture that provides a foundation for learning, behavior, and health. Young children with a weak early foundation have an increased risk for problems later, when they will need to build on those basic capabilities established in the early years to develop more complex skills" (Schumacher & Hoffman, 2008).

Caring adults need to actively involve themselves in observing, helping, and extending children's play during child-initiated play activities. As adults circulate among children during play, they can observe the play and interactions, engage in conversations with children about their play and experience, and support children's problem solving efforts. Responsive adults guide children's communication and mental development with timely and appropriate questions; both open-ended (how, why, and what-if questions) and more specific 'yes' or 'no' questions. High quality instructional support provides quality feedback, builds children's learning, and increases knowledge that makes a difference in school readiness and future academic success. Each early learning standard includes examples of adult supports that guide development through timely, responsive, and appropriate interactions with the child.

Families are children's crucial caregivers and first teachers, and partners in early care, health, and education programs. Creating partnerships with families is essential to ensure that children receive the best learning experiences within and outside the home. All adults involved in a child's day should exchange observations and information every day in order to plan and respond appropriately to the child's needs. In addition, when young children are in early care or education settings outside of the home, it is best to set up caregiving and relationship routines rooted in the familiar cultural background of the family.

What Relationships Means for Families

1. Families are children's first teachers. During play, families can observe the play, encourage children to continue in their play, participate in play, ask open-ended questions, and use brief conversation to share in the joy of the children's discoveries.
2. Families provide their children with learning opportunities throughout their waking day, using whatever materials and routines they have at hand. When their children cannot complete a task, the family member provides "just enough" help to allow for success.
3. Families are equal partners with other adults who work with their children. Families share observations about their children's activities at home, and their opinions and expectations must hold a high priority when other adults who work with their children plan for their children.

The Importance of Physical and Mental Health

Children learn best when they are healthy, safe, free of hunger, and have nurturing caregivers. Well-child visits at an established medical home and regular dental care at a dental home provide an important review of development, behavior, mental well-being, immunizations, oral health, vision, and hearing. Balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, and physical activity help children grow, and set the stage for healthy habits and life-long learning. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers must have basic needs met in order to be ready to learn.

Consistent routines and experiences that happen about the same time and in about the same way each day provide comfort and a sense of safety to young children. Familiar routines allow children to predict what will happen next, which allows them to feel a sense of control over the events in their lives. Routines also provide opportunities for building relationships, self-control, curiosity, vocabulary, and learning in all areas of development (ZERO TO THREE, 2008).

Early childhood mental health is sometimes referred to as social and emotional development. Mental health in the early years includes the ability to form relationships with adults and other children, to experience and manage emotions, and to explore environments and learn—all in the family, community, and cultural setting (Cohen, Onunaku, Clothier, & Poppe, 2005). Nurturing relationships are key to the formation of positive mental health.

Children's mental health is at risk if they are exposed to events or environments that harm social, intellectual, and emotional functioning. These types of negative events, such as abuse or neglect, are known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and can impact a child for her or his entire life. The ACE study was conducted by Dr. Robert Anda and Dr. Vincent Felitti in 1995 and 1997. The findings, combined with results of physical exams and tracking of participant health experiences, showed a powerful connection between harmful experiences in childhood and poor adult health status decades later. "The experiences children have early in life, and the environments in which they have them, shape their developing brain architecture and strongly affect whether they grow up to be healthy, productive members of society" (Gudmunson, Ryherd, Bougher, Downey, & Zhang, 2013).

It is important to consider each child, individually, in all areas of a child's development, including physical and mental health. Early care, education, health, mental health, and family support providers must possess awareness of a child's health in order to individualize and promote overall development and well-being. Consistent daily care and learning experiences in healthy, nurturing, and safe environments foster the development of each child, with the flexibility to capture the interests of the children and individual abilities of each child.

What Physical and Mental Health Means for Families

1. Find a trusted primary health care provider and dentist who know your child and become familiar with her or his needs.
2. Keep adult and child vaccines current to assist in preventing illnesses.
3. Help your child grow and develop by providing balanced, nutritious meals, including breast milk for babies, and regular naps and bedtimes.
4. Support the physical development of your child by providing at least 60 minutes of active play indoors and outdoors per day.
5. Support the mental development of your child by responding to her or his needs and by providing a safe, stable, predictable, and compassionate environment.
6. Prevent many significant injuries to your child by providing careful supervision at all times.
7. Speak to your child in nurturing ways and take time to understand his or her needs by watching your child during regular routines and play.
8. Provide safe sleep environments for children. Place your baby on her or his back to sleep in a crib with no blankets, bumper pads, or toys until the first birthday. It is dangerous for babies to sleep in car seats that are outside a vehicle, bouncy seats, baby swings, or adult beds.
9. Help keep your child healthy by washing hands before making meals and snacks, eating, feeding a child, after using the bathroom, after changing diapers, after assisting in the bathroom, and after wiping a nose.

The Importance of Play

Play is important for the ideal development of every child. Play is included as a right of every child in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Committee of the Rights of the Child, 2013). Research shows, and continues to explore and support, the basic value and positive benefit of play as a helpful approach to learning for young children (Hyson, n.d.; Lifter, Foster-Sanda, Arzamarski, Briesch, & McClure, 2011). The most recent position statement on *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children Birth through 8* (NAEYC, 2009) describes that the initial and long-term benefits of play include development of self-control (self-regulation skills), language, reasoning, and social skills.

Play is essential for infants, toddlers, and preschool age children to develop healthy active brains, bodies, and relationships (Ginsburg, 2007). Play must be a natural method for learning in early care and education programs. Children learn about themselves and the world through self-created experiences and positive social interactions with other children and nurturing adults. Children need time, space, supportive adults, open-ended materials (encourage creativity), and safe, yet challenging environments. As a result, children develop confidence in themselves; abilities to master their environment; deep-seated ties to and caring about others; and the ability to create environments of love, safety, security, and resilience (Ginsburg, 2007).

Children enrolled in highly academic programs dominated by teacher-directed activities may become academically prepared for the first years of school. However, research verifies that a healthy balance between preparing for the future and living fully in the present through child-centered and organized play experiences; and caring adult-child connections better prepare children for life - emotionally, socially, and academically (Elkind, Clemens, Lewis, Brown, Almon, & Miller, 2009; Ginsburg, 2007; Gopnik, 2012; Miller & Almon, 2009). All children need the support of nurturing and caring adults who understand, value, and provide opportunities for play in ways that enable the access of their inborn motivations to understand or do what is just beyond their current understanding or mastery to encourage growth.

The Iowa Early Learning Standards emphasize the importance of play in learning by integrating play into every content area of development, using examples of both indoor and outdoor play, to show how adults can support children's natural inclinations, motivations, joy, and learning. Play is natural. Play is meaningful. Play is joyful. Play is essential as we engage and prepare young children for their future.

Adults best support play when they believe and practice the following:

- Value child-initiated play and recognize that play is learning
- Balance child-initiated play with appropriate levels of adult guidance
- Provide adequate time and space for infants, toddlers, and preschool age children to experience the joy of exploring and discovering their world through play
- Recognize play as a demonstration of what children know and are thinking
- Link inside environments to outside environments to provide settings where new knowledge is built about objects, people, and events
- Understand that play is not about the toy - but about the act, the experience, the process, or the outcome
- Use play intentionally to support children's learning and development
- Use play behaviors to observe and document what children know and can do
- Base curriculum on play
- Use play as an intervention to enable children's progress and development of increasingly complex levels of play
- Use play to promote children's positive approaches to learning (Hyson, n.d.)
- Recognize that play is developmental and deserves consideration within all domains of development (Lifter, Foster-Sanda, Arzamarski, Briesch, & McClure, 2011)

Families can provide toys to encourage open-ended play. Open-ended toys have a variety of uses and support creativity in children. Open-ended toys include blocks, play dough, objects to sort, paper, and all types of writing and drawing tools that allow and encourage creativity. As families observe, describe, and ask open-ended questions about child play, they build the skills necessary for their children to understand the world and how to interact with others.

As families seek appropriate early care and education settings for their children, it is important to look for environments where the child care center or home provider setting encourages child-initiated play. The schedule must provide many opportunities for children to play by themselves or in small groups, where they can learn from each other. Rather than worksheets, coloring pages, or cut and paste activities, families can expect art creations which are unique to each child. These creations invite children to use expanding vocabulary to describe the creative process and the result of their efforts

What Play Means for Families

It is vital for families to recognize the importance of child-initiated play, whether at home or in early care and education settings. Play supports children's curiosity and develops their knowledge about why things work the way they do. Families need to understand that through play, their children explore and practice many important skills, including the following:

- Movement of their whole bodies (large muscle)
- Movement of fingers and hands (small muscle)
- Getting along with friends (social and emotional development)
- Solving problems (mathematics)
- Speaking and listening (communication, language, and literacy)

The Role of Technology and Interactive Media

Children can learn about technology when provided opportunities to explore and experience media in age-appropriate ways (Roskos, Burstein, You, Brueck, & O'Brien, 2011). It is essential during technology exploration that adults are present to supervise, to interact with children, and to frame the learning. This helps children understand what they view and to apply it to the world around them (Labbo, 2009; Turbill, 2001). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) discourages all screen media for children less than 18 months of age, except video chatting with the assistance of a caring adult. For children ages 18-24 months, it is recommended that caregivers use high quality, educational media and use that technology to interact with the child. Further, children two to five years of age should be limited to one hour per day of high quality screen time, alongside a caring adult who can help them understand what they view and how to apply it to the world around them (AAP, 2016).

Key messages by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Fred Rogers Center position statement on technology (2012) include the following:

- When used intentionally and appropriately, technology and interactive media are effective tools to support learning and development
- Intentional use of technology requires early childhood teachers and administrators to have information and resources regarding the nature of the tools and the implications of use with children
- Limitations on the use of technology and media are important
- Special considerations are necessary to the use of technology with infants and toddlers
- Attention to digital citizenship and suitable access is essential
- Need for ongoing research and professional development

What the Use of Technology and Interactive Media Means for Families

1. Families know that technology is a part of our culture and an important tool for communication and learning. However, technology is not a substitute for one-on-one time with family members. Intentional use of technology can support children's development in areas such as literacy, mathematics, and science.
2. Families can provide opportunities for children to use technology together, such as reading digital storybooks or watching a favorite developmentally appropriate children's show together.
3. It is critical that families protect children from excessive amounts of 'screen time,' as well as inappropriate media, such as violent programs. Instead, families must recognize that children learn through play, and providing extended periods playing with their children is important.
4. Restricting use of technology during meals and for one hour before bedtime is recommended (AAP, 2016).