Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages 3 to 5

Child’s Growth and Learning

Social & Emotional Development

Creatives Arts

Science

Mathematics

Language & Literacy Development

Health & Physical Development

Approaches to Learning
One of the primary goals of a quality early childhood program is to foster social and emotional development in young children. By learning how to appropriately express and manage their feelings, children will learn to get along with others. This includes learning to take turns, to lead and follow, etc. Preschool children benefit from adult support and modeling to develop the ability to work through interactions and utilize appropriate problem-solving skills.

The key to social and emotional development is strong, positive, secure relationships. Young children need parents, extended families, teachers, caregivers and other adults who are supportive and attentive, and who provide safe and predictable environments. Such environments promote a healthy sense of self and connections with others. High quality environments provide experiences to foster independence, cooperation, and appreciation of diversity. Children who have special needs need to participate in daily routines and activities as independently as possible to develop positive self-esteem and social skills.

Young children who can listen, pay attention, remember directions, and control their behavior will benefit more from preschool and be better prepared for kindergarten.
Self Concept
(SE.01)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child develops independence, confidence, and competence
  - Likes self and shows pride in accomplishments
  - Joins other children in various play activities
  - Shows growing independence in a range of activities, routines, and tasks
  - Chooses from a range of materials and activities within the program
- Child identifies own characteristics (name, age, gender, family)

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:
- Is willing to try a new activity (soap painting, cooking project) and pursues it for a meaningful period of time
- Introduces self and family members to others
- Initiates interactions with others
- Selects and participates in chosen activities independently
- Points to body parts when asked
- Draws a self-portrait including unique characteristics and detail

The Adult:
- Plans and allows for individual learning styles (temperaments) of the children
- Allows children to experiment with their growing competence and independence
- Supports children’s developing appreciation of their gender and cultural identity
- Models self confidence in interactions with children and others
- Encourages child to help another child pour and serve snacks and meals, or select partner for an activity

The Environment Includes:
- Materials that encourage children’s interaction, involvement, exploration and experimentation (mirrors, clay, paint, paper)
- Materials for children to learn about their own culture and the culture of others (music, family photos, books, posters, dramatic play materials)
- Displays that celebrate all children and all families, including people from diverse backgrounds other than the children and community
Strategies to Support Self Concept

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- Whenever possible, provide enough of the same type of materials so children are not preoccupied with having access to them. This allows them to focus on working with the material while learning independence and confidence.
- Provide opportunities for children to be leaders; for example, ask them to suggest movements at group time or ways to transition from one activity to another.
- Encourage children in what they are doing by using art materials the same way they do. If the child is drawing circles, get another piece of paper and draw circles too. By imitating, you are telling the child that you accept and value that they child is doing. This imitation often prompts conversation.

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Promote use of gestures, simple signs, pictures, and technology for children who are not yet speaking to allow expression of name, family members, gender, etc.
- Use visual schedules to allow children to predict what happens next.
- Provide materials that allow children who have special needs to participate independently such as large-handled or differently-sized scissors or pencils.
- Divide skills and behaviors into smaller steps.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Adults learn how to pronounce and write each child’s name correctly.
- When describing the home languages and communication styles of families and children whose home language is other than English, avoid negative words.
- Display pictures with words in children’s home language.
- Provide opportunities and encouragement to develop and maintain the home language while learning English.
- Work with interpreters, cultural mediators and/or other community members if staff does not speak the children’s home language.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:

- Provide a variety of books representing diverse cultures, and a variety of dolls representing multiple ethnicities.
- Depictions and representations of diverse ethnicities should be authentic, and not, for example, just a brown-colored cartoon character with Caucasian features.
- Create an environment in which children encounter objects, pictures, and people that they can identify with, including non-traditional families.
- Avoid stereotypic or outdated depictions of ethnic groups. For example, people wearing only traditional clothing (Native American Indian in a headdress), or directing children to “sit Indian-style.”
- Provide a variety of materials that portray men and women of all ages and different ethnic groups engaged in jobs that are familiar to most children in the community.
Self Control
(SE.02)
Widely Held Expectations

- Child expresses feelings and shows concern for others
  - Shows awareness and responds appropriately to the feelings of others
  - Calms self after excitement, expresses strong emotions constructively and learns to control aggression and impulses
  - Manages fears by expressing concerns and accepting support from adults

- Child follows rules, routines, and directions
  - Attempts to solve problems with other children independently, by negotiation or other socially acceptable means
  - Participates in daily routines without being asked
  - Builds awareness and ability to follow basic health and safety rules

- Child transitions between tasks with minimal direction from adults

Learning in Action: Examples

**The Child:**
- Follows simple program rules with few reminders
- Moves from free play to clean up with ease and purpose
- Uses words and other means of communication to describe feelings (excitement, happiness, sadness, and fear)
- Learns coping and self-regulation skills to manage disruptive, aggressive, angry, defiant and impulsive behaviors

**The Adult:**
- Models and helps children recognize feelings and find appropriate ways to express them
- Maintains a relatively stable schedule or sequence of activities during the day; talks about what is going to happen, prepares children for changes and prepares for smooth transitions between activities
- Establishes trusting, caring relationships with each child
- Provides words, and positive, consistent and fair responses to guide children’s self-control
- Helps children set goals and develop follow through with plans
- Helps children understand and appreciate individual personalities
- Promotes a feeling of community by involving children in developing classroom/group rules
- Looks for what is motivating the child’s behaviors that interferes with learning (physical or medical needs; attention-getting; avoidance of task; or sensory issue)
The Environment Includes:
- A posted daily schedule, including pictures of activities, which provides a variety of active and quiet times, group activities and alone times, and lets children know what is available and what comes next
- Clear program rules that provide supportive guidance for development of self-control, such as 1) Be Safe, 2) Be Respectful and, 3) Be Responsible
- Adequate amount of accessible materials with supportive encouragement for turn-taking
- Visual representations (social cue cards, posters and stories) to support social strategies

Strategies to Support Self Control

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:
- Provide clear behavioral expectations and use effective methods to prevent and redirect misbehavior. Emphasize problem solving rather than blame or punishment.
- Take a photo of each child and cut it out like a paper doll. Attach the photo to craft stick. Children put their stick in the labeled container that demonstrates how they feel. Get free downloadable patterns for “emotion faces” and other activity ideas for teaching social emotional skills from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL).
- Teach children that there are multiple ways to solve problems, and how to respond to different situations. Download the free “Scripted Stories for Social Situations” and “Solution Kit Cards” from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), post or laminate them, punch one corner and attach them together with a ring. When children have a problem, help them find the best solution that will work for them.

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:
- Support self-regulation through “plan/do” or “first/then” activities, using picture schedules when appropriate (“First we wash our hands, then we eat breakfast”).
- Provide alternative activities for transitions and wait time.
- Provide photos or videos to demonstrate how each step of an activity/task is completed.
- Facilitate turn taking through modeling, prompting, and coaching peers.
- Provide choices so children make decisions and feel more control over their environment.
- Communicate with parents for their ideas about what works best with their child.

Supporting English Language Learners:
- Explain rules and social strategies; teach feeling words in both the home language and English with the help of an interpreter.
- Display pictures with words in children’s home language.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:
- Include a variety of cultures and physical characteristics in visual representations.
- Lead discussions of similarities and differences among different cultures to help children understand and appreciate diversity and to develop of sense of community. For example, everyone experiences the same emotions but they may be expressed differently.
- Consult with families about cultural norms and behavior expectations.
Cooperation
(SE.03)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child increases ability to sustain relationships
  - Uses compromise and conflict resolution skills
  - Plays actively with other children
  - Attempts to solve problems with other children independently, by negotiation, or other socially acceptable means
  - Uses language to engage others in meaningful conversation
  - Recognizes how actions affects others and accepts consequences for own actions

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:

- Works on projects with other children (shares labor, follows rules)
- Waits to take a turn in activity
- Plays side by side with other children
- Works cooperatively with another child who is painting on the same side of the easel
- Sits next to a new child and helps the child with snack routine
- Turns pages of book while adult reads/tells the story

The Adult:

- Provides materials that encourage interactive play with others
- Encourages children to rely on each other
- Provides opportunities for children to work in small groups in which each child has a specific responsibility
- Provides peer mentors to learn cooperation skills
- Models cooperation by asking, “Can I have that when you are done?”

The Environment Includes:

- Picture instructions demonstrating appropriate behaviors during routine times
- Adequate amounts of materials and equipment for children to take turns in conversations with peers and group discussion
- Time and space for group project work (building a block tower, painting a large box, planting a garden,) as well as quiet, private time to work alone
- Materials such as trays, placemats, or rugs to allow children to define their space
- Open-ended toys such as blocks and doll houses that create opportunities for turn taking and encourage cooperation and problem solving
- Visual cues for social strategies (conflict resolution steps and emotions chart)
Strategies to Support Cooperation

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- Plan opportunities for children to interact with one another and show concern if one of their peers is upset. Teach children to respect each other, cooperate, and share materials.
- Anticipate problems and plan so you can predict and support all children. Say, “I know everyone wants a turn when we play our game, so we are going to draw names for whose turn it is. That way everyone will get a turn,” or, “This can be hard when you are first learning. No worries, I will be here to help if you need it.” Adults help resolve problems effectively and in a timely manner.

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Use gestures, simple signs, pictures, and technology for children who cannot yet speak, and facilitate/support use with all children to communicate with each other.
- Facilitate turn taking through modeling, prompting, and coaching peers to recognize the “turns” of children who may not be speaking.
- Use existing daily routines to provide times for natural social interactions with others.
- Include multisensory supports, sign language, technology, Braille dots, and other adaptations to allow access for all children.
- Provide visual schedules and supports (cues and prompts) for following directions.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Provide and teach language for cooperation and social interactions in both the home language and English if possible.
- Provide and teach language to engage others in meaningful conversation. For example, if a child initiates a conversation in the home language, supply the language in English through an interpreter if possible.
- Use pictures and actions to teach the language needed for conflict resolution through an interpreter if possible.
- Use first/then picture boards to help children transition between activities more smoothly.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:

- Provide materials from a variety of cultures for cooperative play such as cooking and eating utensils, play food, dress up clothing, jewelry, scarves, multiethnic books, dolls and puppets, musical instruments, and baskets made of different materials in all areas of the learning environment.
- Label cubbies so newcomers know where their belongings go.
- Introduce new children to all others and help them make connections.
Social Relationships
(SE.04)

Widely Held Expectations

- Develops secure relationships with adults and other children
- Child interacts empathetically and cooperatively with adults and peers
  - Receives social support and shows loyalty to a friend
  - Solves problems with other children independently
  - Shows awareness of and responds to the feelings of others
  - Knows how to join a group of playing children
- Adapts to new environments with appropriate emotions and behaviors

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:
- Uses words to express anger, such as “I don’t like it when you push me!” or “That makes me mad!”
- Responds to adults’ questions
- Notices who is absent from circle time and asks about it, showing concern for others
- Shares by taking turns with materials and toys with other children
- Develops close friendships with one or two children as well as plays with many children
- Initiates conversations with adults and other children
- Accepts and requests guidance from adults

The Adult:
- Provides opportunities for children to develop an awareness of feelings, ideas, and actions of others, such as “Susie looks really happy today!”
- Provides opportunities for children to practice communicating with others (signing, cues, listening and talking)
- Supports children to develop relationships with peers and adults
- Explains the power of words, that some words can hurt or can have both positive and negative meanings depending on how they are used
- Carefully observe child-to-child and child-to-adult interactions and provide opportunities that will promote positive relationships

The Environment Includes:
- Individual opportunities to discuss appropriate behavior in real situations, as they occur
- Constructive means of working through frustration so it doesn’t interfere with relationships
Strategies to Support Social Relationships

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- Ensure you are in close proximity to children. Smile, laugh, and show enthusiasm with children, provide physical contact, give verbal support (“You are working so hard, I know you are going to be able to figure this out!”) and positive expectations. Provide assistance and attention to children who need extra support.

- Make scripted stories with the child’s photos. Scripted stories for social situations help children understand social interactions, situations, expectations, social cues, unfamiliar activities, and/or social rules. See more information and examples you can download from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL).

- Explain the reasons for your actions and decisions that involve moral matters such as fairness, “I’m making sure everyone has one before giving out seconds because it’s not fair if someone gets two before someone none.”

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Provide adaptations to support self-regulation in children; include sensory fidgets, picture charts, and individually modified items to aid in participation.

- Support interactions with other children by using gestures, simple signs, pictures, and technology; children who cannot yet speak need ways to make their wants and needs known, and exchange information with others.

- Use existing daily routines to provide times for natural social interactions with others.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Pair up children who speak languages other than English with English-speaking children to help ease transitions and to help English speaking children learn new words in another language.

- Encourage children who speak the same language to play and work together to help each other negotiate meaning.

- Provide a quiet area in the learning environment where children can relax and take a break from the pressure of learning a new language.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures

- Be aware of gestures, touch, and other social rules of the cultures of the children. For example, a pat on the head is not acceptable in some Asian and East African cultures; snapping fingers is used for animals in some Hispanic cultures and is insulting to use with people.

- Learn from the families what is, and what is not, acceptable in their culture to help children build relationships with those who are similar and different from them.
Knowledge of Families & Communities (SE.05)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child understands and respects similarities and differences among adults and children in their program, home, and community
  - Begins to understand various family roles, jobs, and rules
- Child expresses some understanding of familiar locations in community such as where people live, and where stores, parks, and restaurants are located
- Child uses familiar words to identify family members and workers in their community
- Child understands that events happened in the past and how these events relate to, and can change self, family and community
- Child understands the reason for rules in the home, classroom, and laws in the community

Learning in Action: Examples

**The Child:**
- Reads/looks at books and writes/dictates/shares or dramatizes stories about families/events
- Participates in activities to help others in the group or community
- Sees self as a family member and as a boy or girl in the family
- Recognizes familiar places in their environment (stores, parks, restaurants, roads, buildings, trees, gardens, bodies of water and land formations)
- Recognizes a variety of jobs and the work associated with them
- May recognize other children’s family members: who they are, where they work
- Differentiates between the past, present and future

**The Adult:**
- Helps children describe and appreciate their own characteristics and those of others
- Invites leaders and workers in the community to come to the program
- Takes group on field trips to various places in the community
- Invites families to share their uniqueness (traditions, holidays, food, games, interests, and hobbies)
- Helps children understand how people live and what they do changes over time

**The Environment Includes:**
- Props and materials for children to explore a wide variety of roles and career possibilities
- Props, materials, and displays that depict the community, all types of families, and cultures
Strategies to Support Knowledge of Families & Communities

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:
- Take photos of familiar businesses in your community. Attach them to wood blocks so children can construct your community while working with blocks.
- Display photos of each child’s home and family members, including pets.
- Invite parents to share their job roles by showing photos of where they work, work clothing they wear and have them explain why their job is important to the community.
- Greet all family members by name. You are not only demonstrating to children important social skills, but you are also showing that you respect and value the child’s loved ones.
- Provide non-stereotyped visual examples, and props to encourage children to role-play different occupations.

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:
- Support communication for children who cannot yet speak by using pre-recorded messages on voice output devices, or pictures/photos to tell about their families.
- Provide technology adaptations to support children, such as picture communication boards of family members.
- Communicate with parents for their ideas about what works best with their child; encourage parents to provide written information or materials from home that the child can show.

Supporting English Language Learners:
- Include materials and visuals that accurately reflect the cultures and languages of children and families, such as books that include authentic photographs, illustrations that accurately reflect the cultures of the children.
- Learn how to pronounce and write each child’s name correctly.
- Invite parents or other members of the language minority community to school to share their languages with the children.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:
- Invite family or community members to share and teach children about the stories from their culture, traditions, and music, and tell why they are valued (children may learn to make tortillas, make paper or bread dough flowers, weaving, paper maché, pottery, painting, embroidery or gardening).
- Help children develop and preserve pride in their heritage, language, and culture.
- Embed diverse cultures and languages in the environment and the curriculum: materials, teaching strategies, projects, spoken and written language, the ways families and community are involved.
- Provide a variety of materials that portray men and women of all ages and different ethnic groups engaged in jobs that are familiar to most children in the community.
Print Resources

50 Strategies for Communicating and Working with Diverse Families (2nd ed.), Mena J. Gonzalez (2010).


Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline: The 7 Basic Skills for Turning Conflict into Cooperation, Becky A. Bailey (2000).


Extending the Dance in Infant and Toddler Caregiving: Enhancing Attachment and Relationships, Helen Raikes (2009).


Seven Skills for School Success: Activities to Develop Social and Emotional Intelligence in Young Children, Pam Schiller (2009).

Socially Strong, Emotionally Secure: 50 Activities to Promote Resilience in Young Children, Bruce Nefertiti (2011).

Teaching Children to Care: An Empathy Curriculum for Preschoolers, Nancy Mullin-Rindler and Maureen Crowley (2002).


Use Your Words: How Teacher Talk Helps Children Learn, Carol Garhart Mooney (2005).

You Can’t Come to My Birthday Party: Conflict Resolution with Young Children, Betsy Evans (2002).


These resources, and many others, may be available for Nebraska residents to borrow from the Early Childhood Training Center’s Media Center by visiting http://www.education.ne.gov/oec/mediactr.html or by calling 1-402-557-6885 or 1-800-89CHILD.
Online Resources

Annotated Bibliographies (click on link below for a description of topical resources available through the Early Childhood Training Center’s Media Center):

- Early Childhood Mental Health, updated on 10/4/11
- Guidance of Young Children, updated on 3/5/12

Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning- Book Nook: guides created for teachers/caregivers and parents to provide hands-on ways to embed social emotional skill building activities into everyday routines
http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#list.


Encouraging social and emotional development at home and at preschool

Social and Emotional Development in Young Children: How parents and providers can support social skills

Developing Self-Regulation in Young Children:
http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/developing-self-regulation ;

Executive Function: Skills for Life & Learning (Video & info sheet):


Understanding Child Traumatic Stress, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

UNL Extension: The Pyramid Model- Promoting Social/Emotional Competence: Resources for Early Childhood Professionals and for Families
http://liferaydemo.unl.edu/web/child/teachingpyramidresources.
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