



Infant-Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN)



Intentional Planning for Infants and Toddlers: Setting the Stage

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January 2018

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The KCCTO-KITS Infant-Toddler Specialist Network is a program of the Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc. and the University of Kansas Life Span Institute at Parsons and is supported through a grant from the Kansas Department for Children and Families' Child Care and Early Education Services. However, information or opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the agency and no official endorsement should be inferred.



Setting the Stage: What you need to know for Intentional Planning

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

Children typically develop in a predictable timeline and sequence. While we know skills do not emerge at the same time for every child, there are general age ranges when we expect certain skills to emerge. We refer to these as *developmental milestones*. Developmental milestones can help you begin to understand a child's current skills and what to expect next, helping you plan activities that will support the child as they work at mastering higher level skills. As you begin to think about intentional planning, examining developmental milestones for a child's age is a good starting point. However, it is important to note that there is variation in development between children, so care should be taken to know what skills the child is already doing, compared to the skills that are listed for a particular age.

There are many wonderful resources for accessing developmental milestones. The Center for Disease Control's Learn the Signs, Act Early resources can provide you with developmental milestones for children birth to age five. To access these milestones, go to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Learn the Signs Act Early website, found at https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/checklists/all_checklists.pdf. In addition to the developmental milestones, the Learn the Signs, Act Early website gives you access to free materials to order or download, a 1-hour training module for early care and education professionals, a Milestone Tracker app for parents and professionals, information on what to do if you are concerned about a child's development, and many, many more resources on learning the signs of typical and atypical or delayed development.

As you examine the developmental milestones that most closely match with the children in your care, you will begin to see predictable patterns of development that can help guide you in your intentional planning of activities to support these developmental steps.

PRACTICE CHECK!

Download and print the developmental milestones from above link for Learn the Signs, Act Early. Choose one child in your care. Using the Learn the Signs Developmental Checklist most closely associated with his/her age, complete the checklist based on the developmental milestones you KNOW he/she has mastered. Highlight the milestones that you are unsure of, and refer back to that as you are interacting with the child later in the day/week. (You will use this child as a practice child throughout the rest of this TA Packet.)



KANSAS EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

Another tool that can support you in understanding appropriate expectations for young children is the Kansas Early Learning Standards. These standards can be found at the Kansas State Department of Education website, accessible here:

<http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Early%20Childhood/KsEarlyLearningStandards.pdf>

The Kansas Early Learning Standards were revised in 2014 by a group of professionals using the latest research and knowledge base, and aligned with the Kansas K-12 College and Career Ready Standards. These standards can be used by early childhood professionals to help guide the creation of purposeful activities within early childhood programs. As you begin to think about intentional planning for young children in your program, review the Kansas Early Learning Standards for more information on the developmental sequence of learning for young children, as well as content that is appropriate for the children in your care.

PRACTICE CHECK!

Refer back to the 'practice child' you chose for the developmental checklist. Using the Kansas Early Learning Standards, find an Early Learning Standard in the Communication & Literacy section related to understanding literature that corresponds with your practice child's age. Can you find these standards? How have you thought about these skills as being related to understanding literature? How do these skills build foundational skills for children to understand literature during their elementary and secondary school years?






RELATIONSHIPS, INTERACTIONS AND TEACHING STRATEGIES


In addition to understanding developmental milestones, to be purposeful planners for early childhood programs, professionals must recognize and value the importance of relationships, interactions and teaching strategies when working with young children. Positive relationships form the basis of strong social-emotional competencies for young children. In turn, these social-emotional competencies are needed to support all areas of development—the whole child. Children rely on positive relationships to form the basis of the learning environment. By intentionally creating positive relationships with each child in your care, you are working towards a stronger foundation for planning individualized, purposeful activities. Additionally, through your relationships with the children, you will learn valuable information that relates to their developmental milestones, strengths, areas of need, interests and goals, which we will discuss later in this TA Packet.

Additionally, early childhood professionals can learn intentional teaching strategies to scaffold learning for the children in their care. When an adult or more competent peer scaffolds learning for a child, it means that they create activities and situations in which the activity is just a bit too difficult for the child to do on their own, but just the right level of difficulty for a child to be successful with the help of an adult. By scaffolding activities for children, teachers are able to stretch the child’s abilities. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has identified intentional teaching strategies that can be used to scaffold learning for young children.


- 📖 **Acknowledge:** Excellent teachers notice what children say and do and give the child positive acknowledgement through commenting, smiling, or gesturing.
 - “You helped Lucy open her granola bar. Look at her smile!”
 - You observe Livia working to reach the soap and independently wash her hands. After she is successful she looks at you, noticing that you are watching. You give Livia a big smile and a thumbs up.
- 📖 **Encourage:** Excellent teachers encourage children to continue working at tasks, addressing children’s persistence and approaches to learning, rather than just the outcome.
 - “You have been working hard on that puzzle. You only have 3 pieces left!”
 - “You and Kyra have almost dug a hole all the way to the bottom of the sandbox! You have been working on that for a long time!”

 **Give specific feedback:** Excellent teachers use specific comments rather than general words.


- “That green bean just fell off again. Push down hard with your fork.”
- “Look. The train track is broken here. Fix this piece and we can try again.”

 **Model:** Excellent teachers model positive behaviors, problem solving skills, word choice, and attitudes. They employ a “do as I do, not just as I say” attitude.


- “The CD player is not working and I am getting frustrated. I need to take a deep breath and think of another way to play our music.”
- “Jesse, I really appreciate your help in carrying the breakfast to the table. There was so much to carry. Thank you!”

 **Demonstrate:** Excellent teachers understand when children need to see something demonstrated in the correct way. This is reserved for times that something must be done in a particular sequence for success.


- “When you have all of the peel off of your orange, you can stick your thumb in the top like this, then pull the sections apart. Now they are ready to eat!”
- “First I lay my snow pants on the floor, then I sit down and put my feet all the way through to the bottom before I stand up. Now I can pull them up and put my boots on!”

 **Create or add challenge/Reduce challenge:** Excellent teachers understand a child’s developmental level, and can modify activities to meet the child’s needs by adding or reducing a challenge.

- A teacher tapes paper to the table for a child who struggles to color and hold the paper still with the other hand.
- A teacher adds objects to an obstacle course for a child with advanced gross motor skills.

 **Ask questions:** Excellent teachers use open-ended questions to get children to think and respond.

- “What do you think your mom is doing at work right now?”
- “Where would be a good place to set up our picnic spot so we don’t get too hot?”

 **Give assistance:** Excellent teachers understand the developmental level of each child in their care, and are able to give just enough assistance to help the child be competent.

- “That applesauce is delicious! Let’s scoop it on your spoon together so you can eat another bite!”
- “You almost have your shoes on your feet! I’ll hold the tongue while you push your feet in. You did it!”

📖 **Provide information:** Excellent teachers give information such as words, facts and explanations.

- “It does look like a big cat, but it is much bigger and has a hairy mane. This big cat is called a lion.”
- “He is our maintenance worker. He is here to change our lightbulbs. Look. They are all dark. Let’s move our bodies back so he can put his ladder there and we can be safe.”

📖 **Give directions:** Excellent teachers give directions to support children’s actions and behaviors.

- “Kalea, your mouth is full of food. Wait until you chew it all up to put another bite in.”
- “Look here. All of the balls go into this big container so we can clean up our classroom.”

(Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, pg. 36-38)

Note that the LAST two teaching strategies are to provide information and give directions. Often times, teachers will resort to these two teaching strategies FIRST. While they are necessary and useful teaching strategies, take care to ensure that they are not the FIRST and ONLY teaching strategies you use!

PRACTICE CHECK!

Reflect on which Intentional Teaching Strategies you are proficient at and which ones you rarely use. How can you incorporate a more diverse use of ALL teaching strategies into play situations?





THE POWER OF OBSERVATION: WATCH & REFLECT

Watch

Utilizing milestones, early learning standards and teaching strategies can only be successful if professionals are good observers of children. What does this mean? As professionals, we must take time to step back and **watch** children in their daily routines. As we watch them, we should be looking at observable behaviors and actions from many angles to help us learn more about him/her. The following is a list of some questions to consider when you are observing a child. (As you think about these questions, the words “target child” refer to the child you are observing and gaining information about.)

“Where is the target child physically in the room?” (Near others? Alone? Always in the same area? Moving from space to space continually?)

“What are the other children doing, and how does the target child respond to their activity?” (Watches? Joins? Avoids? Doesn’t seem to notice others?)

“Where are the adults in the room and how does the target child respond to their presence or absence?” (Stays near adults? Doesn’t seem to notice adults? Wants to interact with adults by talking, showing, giving objects? Becomes distressed as adults come and go?)

“How is the target child interacting with other children or adults in the room?”
(Staying near? Avoiding? Asking to play? Watching/Laughing/Talking? Sharing Toys? Hitting/Taking Toys/Crying? Helping Others?)

“What is the target child doing with materials/toys?” (Mouthing, Filling/Dumping, Stacking, Throwing, Pretend Play)

“What language, verbal or non-verbal, is the child using?” (Eye contact, Smiling, Crying, Screeching, Arching away, Cuddling, Looking away, Singing, Using spoken words)

Reflect

After identifying concrete, observable behaviors and actions that you have observed, you must also **reflect** on what the actions might mean. This is when we start to work towards understanding the child’s cues based on his/her behaviors. Think about these reflective questions:

“How does the child’s behaviors/interactions match or not match with developmental milestones for children her age?”

“How do I know if the child is enjoying this activity?”

“How do I know if the child is finished with this activity?”

“How do I know if the child is beginning to become distressed? Is this perhaps due to other children, adults, materials, or physical space?”

By observing children in their play and daily routines, and reflecting on what this tells us about the children in our care, we begin to have a better understanding of their developmental level, how they handle relationships with others in the program, and cues to their enjoyment or distress with an activity or situation. This is powerful and necessary information needed to plan intentional, individualized activities for your program. As we become better observers of children's development, play and daily routines, we are able to start to understand the next valuable component of intentional planning: understanding child strengths and interests.

Understanding Children's Assets and Interests

The most beneficial, engaging and developmentally appropriate activities that are planned for young children connect the child's developmental level with their interests. Our discussion to this point has helped us understand the child's development and cues, but we must also take some time to reflect on the child's interests as we plan. The following article, Promoting Young Children's Participation in Interest-Based Everyday Learning Activities, explains the benefits of planning based on everyday interests for young children. Stop now and go to The Family, Infant and Preschool Program to read this article, accessible at:

http://fipp.org/static/media/uploads/casetools/casetools_vol2_no5.pdf

At the end of the article are Activity Checklists that will help you identify children's interests that will lead to the development of engaging activities in your program.

PRACTICE CHECK!

After reading the article "Promoting Young Children's Participation in Interest-Based Everyday Learning Activities" use one of the Interest-Based Everyday Activity Checklists at the end of the article and complete based on the practice child you chose earlier in this packet. What interests particularly stand out to you from this checklist? What other interests does this child have that were not listed on the Checklist? Can you begin to think of engaging activities that are related to the interests you have checked?

At this point, you have gathered the necessary information to create intentional, individualized plans for the children in your care! The next section of this packet will help you put it all together to plan for activities and materials, interactions and teaching strategies, high quality environments, and transitions and routines.