

# Early Learning Foundations



**A Parent's Companion Piece  
to the Early Learning Guidelines  
(Birth through 5 years old)**

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Dear Parents,

Welcome to the wonderful world of parenting! Who would ever believe that a baby could change so many things and cause you to think differently! There will be so many exciting times, from your child's first steps and first words to going to school...time goes so fast! You may already be wondering how you can help your child grow and develop. It is important to note that your child's education does not start when they begin kindergarten; it starts now, and it starts with you. You are your child's first and most important teacher! Everything that you do helps to prepare your child for his/her future success.



This resource provides you with widely held expectations for your child's development prior to kindergarten and ways that you can encourage his/her growth. Although a child's growth and development follows a general pattern, all children grow at different rates. Some children will be doing things earlier or later than others, even different than their own sisters or brothers. There's no need to hurry your child along as time will go by quickly enough!! However, if you have concerns about your child's growth patterns, contact the Early Development Network at 1-888-806-6287.



The Early Learning Guidelines breaks a child's development into 7 categories. Throughout this resource, there will be helpful suggestions to provide ways to encourage your child's growth and development in each of those areas to better prepare them for school.

## Social and Emotional Development

This segment focuses on how children learn about themselves and the world around them. Children are learning how to like and be proud of themselves, take turns, follow directions and routines, get along with others, as well as sustain relationships. As children share materials and play together, they learn to cooperate, listen to others, stand up for their own ideas, handle frustration, and empathize with others.



## Health and Physical Development

This segment focuses on how children's bodies grow and how caregivers can support their child's development through fine-motor and large motor skills, nutrition habits, and personal hygiene. When children are physical, healthy and safe, they are more prepared for success in school.



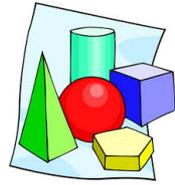
## Language and Literacy Development

This segment focuses on how children learn to communicate, first through words and then through written language. Children are learning how to listen, understand, and communicate.



## Mathematics

This segment focuses on early math skills such as numbers, counting, shapes, sorting, patterns and measurement. When children understand how to perform these operations, they can easily build future math knowledge and skills.



## Creative Arts



This segment focuses on how children explore music, art materials, dance, and imagination. Pretend play helps children learn to think abstractly and to see things from another's perspective as well as to use their imagination to represent objects, people, and ideas.

## Science

This segment focuses on how children develop the base of scientific studies. Children are learning to explore the world around them using all of their senses and discovering how things work.



## Approaches to Learning



This segment focuses on how children learn new materials. Purposeful play promotes a love for learning by stimulating and supporting the development of skills, concepts, and concentration.

# INFANTS: Birth to 18 Months

## Widely Held Expectations

### Birth-4 Months

- Roll from side to back
- Vary cries to tell you what she needs
- Coo back and forth in conversation with you
- Hold and swipe at objects
- Smile and laugh when you play
- Know and prefer your voice

### 4-8 Months

- Touch you and her toys to signal for more
- Recognize names of familiar people, daily routines
- Roll over in both directions
- Pick up toys of all sizes
- Move objects from hand to hand
- Explore toys
- Turn and look toward sounds
- Sit without support

### 8-12 Months

- Combine many different sounds
- Move forward to explore the environment
- Stand with support
- Place toys in containers and take them out again
- Cry and fuss when separating from you

### 12-18 Months

- Use few words to tell you what she wants
- Make simple choices
- Walk independently
- Learn how to make simple things work
- Place pegs or forms into boards or shape boxes
- Express many types of emotion with more intensity



## Social Emotional

- Value our relationship and share in my joy when I do something new.
- Respond to my cries and meet my needs. When you do, I learn to trust that I will be taken care of.
- Show me how to give "soft touches" when I begin to play with others.
- Allow me to build a relationship with other trusting adults.
- Explain what is happening in my world and tell me about the people in it. Photos are a great way to remind me when I can't see them every day.

## Health & Physical

- Give me safe toys that I can put into my mouth, that's how I learn about them. A quick way to decide if it's too small for me is to see if it fits in a toilet paper tube.
- Let me learn to use my muscles to learn how to sit up, crawl and walk in safe environments.
- Provide a safe environment for me to play, grow, and learn.
- Offer healthy food options to me.
- Let me hold my own spoon as you're feeding me.

## Language & Literacy

- Tell me what you're doing when you bathe me.
- Say, "you want your bottle" when I say, "bah."
- Recite nursery rhymes to me as you feed me.
- Read to me every day. Waiting rooms are a great place to do this.
- Show me books with simple photographs and point to the picture as you say its name.
- Sing me the ABC song as you change my diaper.
- Give me sturdy board books to explore and read on my own.

## Mathematics

- Sing counting songs when you are putting lotion on me.
- Describe the toys I'm playing with; shape, size and location - "You're putting the big red ball on top of the little blue square."
- Tell me what is happening to me - "I'm going to pick you up to change your diaper and then we can read a book."
- Let me practice filling and pouring water with different sized containers in the bathtub.

## Creative Arts

- Help me play with toys that make noise when I move them.
- Sway with me to songs and their beats.
- Provide art materials that I can easily hold and safely put into my mouth, like chubby crayons. If you tape the paper down on my highchair tray, I can color while you cook.
- Move my body parts and rejoice with me as we dance together.
- Support my play with mirrors, dolls, hats, stuffed animals, etc. Pretend with me.

## Science

- Provide me with additional materials like sand and water toys to support my curiosity.
- Allow me to use my developing five senses to learn about cause and effect. I like toys that respond to my actions.

## Approaches to Learning

- Encourage me to try new things, giving me just enough support to do it on my own without doing it for me.
- Provide safe ways to explore my environment and be okay with me making a mess.

# TODDLERS: 18 Months - 3 Years

## Widely Held Expectations



### 18-24 Months

Say two-word phrases

Climb on furniture

Throw a ball

Pretend with dolls and household items

Complete simple puzzles and fit toys together

Play side by side with other children

Show independence through strong emotions

### 2 Years

Combine three to four words in phrases

Ask questions

Balance on one foot and learn to jump

Climb up and down stairs

Fit together objects of different sizes and shapes

Learn about quantities

Act out daily experiences

Play with other children of the same age

## Social Emotional

- Provide books and toys that represent me.
- Give simple explanations - "I know you want the blue cup right now, but it's dirty. You can have the green cup."
- Tell me you're proud of me when I wait my turn to play with a toy.
- Allow me to interact with others, like story time at the library, while showing and telling me how to act.
- Provide photos, books, and toys that represent my family and me.

## Health & Physical

- Give me smaller objects to hold and move with my fingers, but not so small that I may choke. I like to use child-sized utensils.
- Provide safe places that allow me to practice climbing, jumping, and running with you close by to catch me when I stumble.
- Help me remember to wash my hands after using the restroom and before eating and brush my teeth at least once a day.
- Offer and model healthy food choices.
- Have me wash my hands and face by myself with a wash cloth.

## Language & Literacy

- Use short and simple words to describe what I'm playing with - "The big, red ball bounces high."
- Encourage me to use my words when I point to something I want.
- Sing silly songs with me like "I like to eat, eat, eat, apples and bananas. I like to ote, ote, ote opples and bononos" (repeat with a different vowel sound each time).
- Explore books with me every day - Keep a book with you so I have something to do when we are waiting in line.
- Point out words and letters as we go for a walk. The most important letter to me is the one that starts my name.
- Let me scribble with chubby crayons and paper taped to the table.

## Mathematics

- Help me to count the toys as we put them away, asking "I wonder how many stuffed animals we have?"
- Ask me to bring you the square puzzle piece when we are picking up together.
- Follow a set routine so I begin to understand times of the day and ask me if I know what comes next.
- Encourage me to match colors when I'm eating colored cereal or snacks.

## Creative Arts

- Sing/say songs/stories that have rhythm and move to the beat with me.
- Provide smaller art materials that I can easily hold, like water paints and thick pencils. I may make a mess, but I will learn about colors and develop my fine motor skills, too.
- Use silly songs and dances to help me with activities I may not enjoy, like picking up my toys or getting dressed.
- Let me pretend to be anything or anyone I want, regardless of my gender. This is how I learn about myself and others.

## Science

- Let me help plant a seed and take care of it as it grows.
- Support my curiosity to learn about my world. I ask a lot of questions and I learn more when we discover things together.

## Approaches to Learning

- Provide me with extra patience when I want to do things on my own, even if I can't, eventually I will.
- Let me explore what happens when I try new things on my own.

# PRESCHOOL-AGED: 3 - 5 Years



## Widely Held Expectations

### 3 Years

Learn many ideas and use new words in short sentences

Ask many questions and tell stories

Become more coordinated for running, climbing, and riding  
a tricycle

Learn about gender and family differences

Match colors and shapes

Learn to play with other children

Learn to solve problems

### 4 Years

Use words to respond to others

Use longer sentences in conversations

Improve drawing, building, and cutting skills

Discover about sizes, volumes, shapes, and colors

Learn to count

Participate in dramatic play

Play cooperatively with other children

Recognize some numbers and letters

### 5 Years

Run jump, hop, skip, and climb with ease

Follow three-step directions

Recognize printed name

Ask and answer who, what, when, where questions

Enjoy games and follow simple rules

Understand right and wrong

## Social Emotional

- Tell me I can do it, and when I do, acknowledge that I did it all by myself.
- Remind me of your expectations for my behavior - "Remember when we're at Grandma's house, we don't run and I will remind you by saying 'walking feet'."
- Practice self-regulation by playing games that follow directions like "Simon Says".
- Model self-regulation by stating "I'm really mad right now, so I need a minute to calm down before I talk to you."
- Let me play with other children so I can learn to share and work together.
- Teach me about my family within our community and world.
- Help me see how all people are the same and to appreciate differences.

## Health & Physical

- Give me tools like scissors and work with me so I learn how to use them safely.
- Take me outside to play, and if weather isn't nice, take me to an indoor area where I can move my whole body every day.
- Help me understand why activities like washing my hands and brushing my teeth are our everyday routine.
- Teach me to choose more healthy food options and understand why it's important.
- Encourage me to pick out my own clothes and let me try putting them on by myself.

## Language & Literacy

- Tell me what you're doing, step by step, as you prepare our meal.
- Ask questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no response to encourage me to use lots of words that I am learning.
- Play letter - sound matching games with me - "What else starts with b, buh?"
- Let me help you read my favorite books. This can be a special part of our nighttime routine.
- Help me recognize words in my favorite book by pointing at the words and sounding out the letters.
- Encourage me to practice writing my name by using different tools - magnetic letters, stencils, markers, chalk.

## Mathematics

- Encourage me to count objects around me and talk about changes in the number of objects when you add or take things away. "How many cookies do you have if you give one to me?"
- Help me place objects - when we set the table together, tell me to first put the cup next to the plate, then put the fork on top of the napkin.
- Ask me about what happened yesterday, and what will happen tomorrow. I can also guess what might happen next in a story and help you follow a recipe.
- Let me help you sort things, like laundry, or silverware, and match colors or sizes.

## Creative Arts

- Allow me to create my own music with instruments we create together - dried beans in an oatmeal container can be a maraca and a drum.
- Provide many different tools to allow me to explore how they can be used to create something. I learn so much more when I'm allowed to explore and do things on my own, so be proud of what I create even if it doesn't look like what I say it is!
- Take me to safe spaces so I can dance and interact with music and rhythm indoors and outdoors, every day.
- Let me play with props to re-enact stories and everyday situations, like going to the doctor or store.
- Stimulate my imagination by making props together, using things around the house.

## Science

- Provide me with lots of hands-on activities to explore nature together. (I like to guess what may happen, then try it with you to see if I was right.)
- Ask me lots of open ended questions - "How do you know that? What do you think will happen? Why does it do that?" I may not be correct, but it's important that you value my thought processes.

## Approaches to Learning

- Ask, "What do you think?" and "Let's find out!" when I ask questions.
- Ask, "How do you know that?" and "Why do you think that?" when I answer a question.



Teaching me the love of learning is the best way to prepare me for kindergarten. You can encourage that love by providing me with many different experiences, planned activities, playing with me, and taking advantage of everyday learning moments.

I will do well in school if I can:

- Get along with others and make friends
- Share and take turns
- Care about how other people feel and communicate my feelings
- Calm myself when upset and ask for what I need

With these skills, I will be better able to:

- Pay attention to the teacher and follow simple instructions
- Stay in my seat/area and focus on the task at hand
- Try new things and solve problems

As you start thinking about preparing me to start school, please read *Ready for Success: What Families Want to Know about Starting School in Nebraska*, which is available at:



[www.education.ne.gov/OEC/ready\\_for\\_success.html](http://www.education.ne.gov/OEC/ready_for_success.html)

# Family Resources

## American Red Cross

[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

Information about CPR and First Aid classes and swimming lessons

## Answers4Families

[www.answers4families.org](http://www.answers4families.org)

Information, opportunities, education, and support to Nebraskans with special needs and their families

## Early Childhood Training Center

[www.education.ne.gov/OEC/ectc.html](http://www.education.ne.gov/OEC/ectc.html)

Library resources and parenting information, child care resources

## Early Development Network

<http://edn.ne.gov/cms/>

Information about services and support for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families

## Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies

[http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/lifespanhealth\\_healthy Mothers Healthy Babies.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/lifespanhealth_healthy Mothers Healthy Babies.aspx)

Trained nurses answer questions, provide referrals for medical, financial, emotional and other health related issues

## Nebraska 2-1-1

[www.ne211.org](http://www.ne211.org)

Information about health and human services for children and families

## Nebraska CHILDFIND

[www.childfind.ne.gov](http://www.childfind.ne.gov)

Information about child development for parents of children with disabilities and information about their rights, and resources

Nebraska Department of Education  
301 Centennial Mall South  
P.O. Box 94987  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4987  
402-471-2295  
[www.education.ne.gov](http://www.education.ne.gov)

Office of Early Childhood  
402-471-3184  
[www.education.ne.gov/oec](http://www.education.ne.gov/oec)  
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Office of Special Education  
402-471-2471  
[www.education.ne.gov/sped](http://www.education.ne.gov/sped)  
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Head Start State  
Collaboration Office  
402-471-2463  
Joan Luebbbers, Director  
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