



California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings



State of California,
Department of Social
Services (2026)

Publishing Information

The *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings* was developed by WestEd for the California Department of Social Services. See Acknowledgments for the names of those who made significant contributions to this resource.

This publication was developed by WestEd under the direction of Osnat Zur, Peter Mangione, and Ann-Marie Wiese working in collaboration with the following team from the California Department of Social Services, Child Care and Development Division: Nadirah Jones, Education Administrator; Lisa Sullivan, Child Development Consultant; Heather McClellan-Brandusa, Child Development Consultant; and Sandra Gonzales-Pabón, Child Development Consultant. It was authored, designed, and prepared for printing by the staff of WestEd.

It was published by the California Department of Social Services, 744 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814. It is distributed under the provisions of the Library Distribution Act and Government Code Section 11096.

The materials in this document evolved from materials or products developed in part by the California Department of Education and were written/produced by the California Department of Social Services.

Copyright © 2026 by the California Department of Social Services.

All rights reserved.

Photo Credits

Glynn Butterfield

Jeff Caroli

Travone Evans

Lisa Fryklund

Christian Holden

Gabriel Parra

Faith Polk

Mandi Selvester

Sara Webb-Schmitz

Juan Zaragota

A Message From the California Department of Social Services

The California Department of Social Services is pleased to present the *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings*. This publication is an update to the *California Preschool Program Guidelines*, a California Department of Education 2015 publication that addresses high-quality preschool programming primarily in center-based settings.

The *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings* is an essential publication with guidance in critical elements for establishing and maintaining high-quality preschool settings. This updated publication considers the mixed-delivery system that serves preschool-aged children in California, including family child care homes, center-based settings, and school-based settings. It complements and builds upon regulations and policies that govern any early learning and care setting serving children ages 3 through 5 and is best used with other resources in the California Early Learning and Development System, such as the *California Guidelines for Child Care in Home Settings* and the *Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning and Development Foundations*.

This publication opens with two introductory sections that provide overall framing for the guidelines followed by three thematic sections: Setting the Stage for Quality, Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families, and Supporting Children’s Learning and Development. Grounded in current research, the guidelines emphasize existing best practices and introduce new strategies for maintaining high-quality preschool settings while supporting California’s diverse children and families. The guidelines and examples in this publication provide both new and experienced professionals with a comprehensive view of policies and practices designed to build and maintain high-quality preschool settings.

Overall, it is our hope that the *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings* is an invaluable resource to leaders, educators, and staff as they seek to provide developmentally appropriate early learning and care to preschool-aged children, thereby setting the foundation for children’s long-term educational success and general well-being.

Lupe Jaime-Mileham

Lupe Jaime-Mileham, EdD
Deputy Director
Child Care and Development Division

Acknowledgments

The development of the *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings* involved input from numerous individuals and groups. Contributors included the following: project leaders, writers, subject matter experts, reviewers from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), early childhood interested parties and constituencies, educator focus groups, early childhood students in higher education, and WestEd project and quality assurance staff.

Project Leaders

The following individuals are gratefully acknowledged for their overall leadership:

Lupe Jaime-Mileham, Nadirah Jones, Lisa Sullivan, Heather McClellan-Brandusa, and **Sandra Gonzales-Pabón** from the California Department of Social Services and **Peter Mangione, Osnat Zur**, and **Ann-Marie Wiese** from WestEd.

WestEd Staff

The following WestEd staff members are gratefully acknowledged for content leadership and for writing sections of the *Preschool Guidelines for All Settings*:

Content Leadership

Ann-Marie Wiese
Peter Mangione
Osnat Zur

Introduction

Amy Cordier
Ann-Marie Wiese
Peter Mangione
Osnat Zur

Setting the Stage for Quality

Amy Woodbridge
Amy Cordier

Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families and Children

Tatiana Hill-Maini
Anabel Castillo

Supporting Children's Learning and Development

Amy Woodbridge
Rosalie Odean
Anabel Castillo
Amy Cordier

The following WestEd staff members are gratefully acknowledged for their project support and final production of the publication:

Project Management and Administrative Support

Alexandra Le Varrat
Gina Morimoto
Grace Srinivasiah
Erika Vásquez-Chilín

Design, Copyediting, and Quality Assurance

Michelle Andrews-Young
Joan Saunders
Matthew Thompson

California Department of Social Services Contributors

The following CDSS divisions provided content reviews of the *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings*:

Child Care and Development Division
Community Care Licensing Division

Subject Matter Experts

The following subject matter experts guided the development of the *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings*:

Elita Amini Virmani, California State University at Sonoma

Anthony Ayala, Solano Community College

Frieda Bennett, Tribal Child Care Association of California and Quartz Valley Indian Reservation Tribal Member

Cindy L. Collado, California State University, Sacramento

JunHee Doh, Catalyst California

Isauro M. Escamilla, San Francisco State University

Linda M. Espinosa, University of Missouri-Columbia

Sarah Garrity, San Diego State University

Jessica Gutiérrez, Fresno Unified School District

Raissa Lee, ABC Mom Learning Center & Childcare

Tonia McMillian, Black ECE

Ann Vessey, WestEd

LaWanda Wesley, Child Care Resource Center

Interested Parties and Constituencies

Many statewide organizations and initiatives provided perspectives in focus groups that informed the development of the *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings*:

Association of California School Administrators
Black Californians United for Early Care and Education

California Association for Bilingual Education

California Association for Teaching, Leading, and Learning (CATLL)/California

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (CASCD)

California Autism Professional Training and Information Network

California Child Care Coordinators Association

California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

California County Superintendents

California Early Childhood Mentor Program

California Family Child Care Network

California Kindergarten Association

California School Boards Association

California State University, Sacramento

California Teachers Association

Californians Together

Desired Results Access Project

Early Edge California

Language Learning Project

Learning Policy Institute

Migrant Education Program

Multilingual Promise

Parent Institute for Quality Education

Preschool GLAD

Sacramento County Office of Education

Sobrato Early Academic Language

Solano County Office of Education

Special Education Local Plan Area

Administrators of California

Stanislaus County Office of Education

Input From the Early Learning and Care Field

Special thanks are also extended to the 93 educators and early education leader focus group participants and higher education student reviewers who provided invaluable feedback that informed the development of the *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings*.

Photographs for the Preschool Guidelines

Thank you to the families and the following early learning and care settings who allowed us to take the photographs used in this publication:

Alameda Family Services—Angela Aguilar Child Care Center

Alma Delia Godinez Family Child Care

Bright Beginnings Family Child Care Home

Castelar Early Education Center

Center for Early Intervention on Deafness

Child Development Educational Studies Lab School

City of Oakland Head Start Programs

Early Childhood Lab School

**Tehama County Office of Education, Help Me Grow Tehama, a Joint Project of
First Five Tehama**

Fremont Unified School District, Parent Involvement Project

Isabel Vazquez Family Child Care Home

Jackie Fernandez Family Child Care

Los Angeles Unified District Early Education Centers

Luv Muffins Preschool & Childcare

Magaly Aviles Vargas Family Child Care

Maria Isabel Arroyo de Vázquez Family Child Care

**Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools' Lighthouse for Children Child
Development Center**

Rodriguez Family Child Care

San Mateo Foster City School District, California State Preschool Program

TLC Preschool

You are Not Forgotten Family Child Care

Yuk Yau Preschool

Contents

Introduction	1
Opening	1
Key Characteristics of High-Quality Preschool Settings	10
Overview of the Guidelines	25
Closing	28
Guidelines at a Glance	31
Setting the Stage for Quality	35
Guideline Area 1: Building a High-Quality Preschool Setting	36
Guideline Area 2: Promoting Children’s Health, Safety, and Nutrition	52
Guideline Area 3: Supporting Staff Well-Being and Professional Learning	64
Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families and Children	77
Guideline Area 4: Engaging With Families in Responsive and Collaborative Ways	78
Guideline Area 5: Affirming the Cultures and Lived Experiences of Children and Families	90
Guideline Area 6: Centering Relationships in Early Learning and Care Settings to Promote Children’s Well-Being	102
Supporting Children’s Learning and Development	115
Guideline Area 7: Planning the Curriculum and the Learning Environment	116
Guideline Area 8: Supporting the Learning and Development of Children With Disabilities	134
Guideline Area 9: Supporting the Learning and Development of Multilingual Learners	150
Guideline Area 10: Assessing Children’s Learning and Development	162
References	175
Appendix	191
Additional Resources Consulted	192
Glossary	200

Page left intentionally blank

Introduction

Opening

The *California Preschool Guidelines for All Settings* (Preschool Guidelines) provides detailed guidance for operating all early learning and care settings serving children 3 through 5 years old. California's mixed-delivery system includes early learning and care provided by relatives, neighbors, family child care homes, child care centers, and public school-based programs such as Transitional Kindergarten. Children's early educational experiences include early learning and care provided in different settings, such as

- part-day or full-day preschool experience in a family child care home, California State Preschool Program (CSPP), or Head Start program;
- part-day or full-day preschool experience at a child care center;
- before-school care provided by a family member, friend, or neighbor and full-day Transitional Kindergarten through a local school district;
- full-day Head Start preschool experience four days a week, spending the fifth day in Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care; and
- part-day CSPP in the mornings and a family child care home in the afternoons.



Regardless of the setting, the priorities and needs of young children and their families remain the same. Recognizing these priorities and needs, this document provides guidance on best practices for promoting the learning and well-being of young children in preschool settings.

This introductory section provides overarching framing of this resource in the following ways: establishing the primary audience for the Preschool Guidelines, describing the California Early Learning and Development System, delineating key characteristics of high-quality preschool settings, and presenting an overview of the guidelines, which provide detailed guidance for establishing and maintaining a high-quality preschool setting. The remaining sections of this document organize the 10 Guideline Areas into three thematic sections: Setting the Stage for Quality, Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families and Children, and Supporting Children's Learning and Development.



Primary Audience for the Preschool Guidelines

The primary audience for this publication is early learning and care professionals who are responsible for leading preschool settings, which are early educational settings mainly serving 3- through 5-year-old children. Across these settings, leaders, educators, and other staff members are collectively responsible for all aspects of the early learning and care of young children.

Key Consideration

Definitions

The term **early learning and care setting** refers to a place in which educators provide early educational experiences and nurturance to support young children's learning, development, and well-being. Settings include family child care homes, center-based settings, and school-based settings.

The term **preschool setting** refers to early learning and care settings mainly serving preschool-aged children (3 through 5 years old).

The term **leader** refers to an educator who has leadership and administrative responsibilities for operating a preschool setting, including family child care homes and center-based and school-based early learning and care settings. Leaders include operators of small or large family child care homes, directors or administrators of single-site or multisite settings, and others who have similar responsibilities.

The term **educator** refers to individuals, including leaders, who are responsible for the early learning and care of children in preschool settings. Educators include family child care providers, teachers, assistants, aides, substitutes, education specialists, education coordinators, and others with similar responsibilities.

The terms **staff** and **staff member** refer to all individuals employed or self-employed in family child care homes and in center-based and school-based early learning and care settings. This includes leaders, educators, and other staff (e.g., early learning and care setting specialists, administrative support staff, family engagement coordinators, cooks, bus drivers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists) who contribute to the early learning and care of children.

Throughout this resource, all glossary terms appear in boldface type the first time they are used in the introduction and then in each Guideline Area.

Leading and Educating in Preschool Settings

Leading in Preschool Settings

Effective leadership is essential for ensuring high-quality outcomes for preschool children and their families. The role of a leader in a preschool setting requires a solid grounding in child development knowledge and best practices in early childhood education. Leaders in preschool settings may hold a wide variety of titles and positions, for example,

- owner-operators of small or large family child care homes, with or without employees;
- directors of single-site preschool settings; and
- directors or administrators that oversee multisite preschool settings.

The individuals leading a preschool setting share similar areas of responsibility regardless of the size or characteristics of the preschool service.

Leaders have an important role in setting the tone or climate for the preschool setting, which is rooted in their own attitudes, values, and experience. Leaders are also responsible for recruiting and hiring well-qualified staff, building strong partnerships with families, securing and managing sufficient resources, and providing guidance to support educators' practice. Leaders facilitate the creation of a collaborative work environment. Together these responsibilities establish the foundation for the design and implementation of a preschool program that exemplifies best practices in all areas. Realizing a vision of high-quality care and education requires partnership among leaders, educators, staff, community members, and other interest holders, such as funding agencies, regional centers, and organizations representing educators.

Implementing structures for reflection, supervision, and professional learning supports the development of educators' competencies and is especially important for **trauma-informed practice**. Settings that affirm educators' lived experiences and support their well-being promote the implementation of reflective, emotionally supportive, and culturally responsive and affirming educational practices (Collado et al., 2025; Herman & Whitaker, 2020).

Educating in Preschool Settings

Building and maintaining supportive relationships with children and families and creating nurturing, inclusive environments oriented around social and emotional development are at the heart of early learning and care experiences for preschool-aged children. An essential part of supporting children's learning and development involves affirming children's lived experiences and developing an understanding of individual children's strengths, needs, and capabilities, which develop in the context of their families and communities. To connect learning to the child's experiences and create a meaningful context for learning, educators learn about individual children's backgrounds, such as

- the family's cultural beliefs, values, and child-rearing practices;
- experiences with one or more languages in the home; and
- the child's **temperament tendencies** as well as any disabilities or developmental delays.

Young children thrive when they have early childhood educators who are in tune with them and understand that strong positive relationships support the development of **resilience** by creating spaces where children feel safe and connected.

Effective preschool educators plan the **environment** and implement **curriculum** to support progress in all domains of learning and development in an integrated way. They skillfully combine sensitive, responsive, and emotionally connected interactions. They also offer active **scaffolding** as children are developing skills by providing frequent, supportive, and meaningful feedback that extends children's individualized learning. They balance educator-initiated activities with child-initiated play and learning. They are intentional in the materials and furniture they choose and how it all is arranged to ensure the environment is developmentally appropriate, inclusive, **accessible**, and supportive of the individualized learning of all children. They assess how well the learning experiences address children's interests and needs and help children make progress in their learning and development. Reflective, intentional teaching based on knowledge of child development, sensitive observation, and documentation of learning have a positive impact on children's well-being and success in the preschool years and beyond (Farran, 2017; von Suchodoletz et al., 2023).



Key Consideration

The Importance of Play in Children's Learning and Development

Play is a primary context for learning in the preschool years and offers joyful opportunities for learning and development across domains. As children play, they engage in social interactions, creativity, self-expression, thinking, problem-solving, and **inquiry-based learning** (Cankaya et al., 2023; Yogman et al., 2018; Zosh et al., 2018). Through playful learning experiences, preschool children explore their environment, exercise their autonomy, learn from each other, and expand their understanding of the world around them. High-quality preschool settings value play and offer children a balance of both child-led and educator-guided play activities to promote children's interest and engagement in learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020; Weisberg et al., 2016). Play also gives educators a natural way to observe and document children's skills, interests, and progress while they are actively engaged in exploration and learning.

Importantly, the lived experiences and backgrounds of educators influence their practice, informing how they interpret and respond to children's behavior, engage with families, and make educational decisions (Karabon, 2021; Lang et al., 2024). For some educators, their own adverse childhood experiences might influence their well-being and the quality of emotional support they provide to children in their care. Educators' capacity to be emotionally present can also be affected by personal life events and changing family responsibilities. This underscores the importance of a supportive workplace culture where educators can access information about available resources and seek help when needed. Overall, educators need ongoing professional learning, opportunities for reflection, and workplace practices that promote well-being and reduce stress so they can provide consistent, responsive, trauma-informed care (Hubel et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2023).

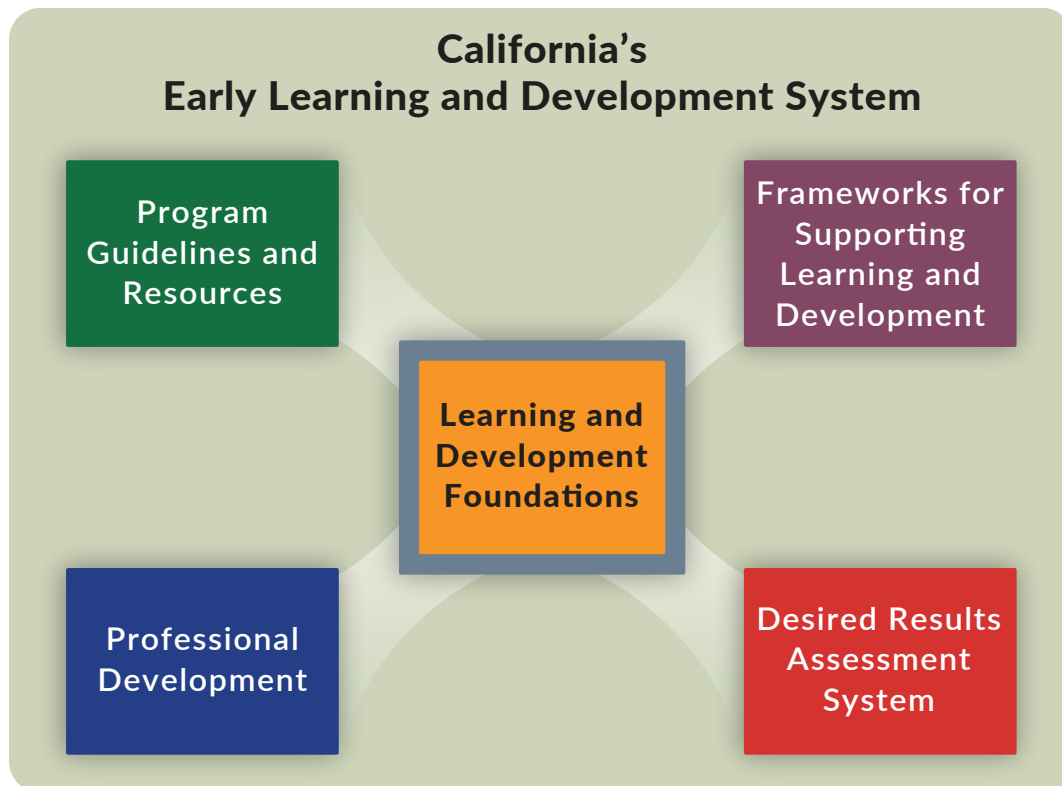
The Preschool Guidelines and California’s Early Learning and Development System

The Preschool Guidelines contribute to a shared understanding of what defines high-quality preschool programming across diverse settings, curricula, and practices. It provides guidance on understanding foundational elements of quality, building relationships with children and families, and supporting children’s learning and development. High quality can look different across settings and communities. A family child care home, a school-based program, and a center-based preschool may each organize space, **routines**, and materials in different ways to build on the strengths and meet the needs of the young children and families they serve. At the same time, high-quality settings share key characteristics, such as emotionally connected and responsive relationships, meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences, and environments that support children’s active engagement in play and learning and their well-being.

Key Consideration

Settings Serving Children Younger Than 3 Years Old

Some preschool settings may enroll children younger than 3 years of age. Family child care homes often serve children of different ages, including infants, toddlers, and school-aged children. The *Preschool Guidelines for All Settings* focuses on children who are 3 through 5 years of age and also, where appropriate, addresses considerations for serving 2-year-old children. Leaders and educators serving children younger than 3 years old alongside preschool-aged children should use resources that focus on the ages of the children they are serving, for example, the [Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines](#) (California Department of Education [CDE], 2019a), the [Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations](#) (ITLDF) (California Department of Social Services [CDSS], 2025b), the [Framework for Infant–Toddler Learning and Development](#) (CDSS, 2025a), and others. Family child care homes serving children of different ages should also use the *California Guidelines for Child Care in Home Settings* (currently under revision).



This publication is part of the California Early Learning and Development System. At the heart of the system are the learning and development foundations. The [**Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations**](#) (CDE, 2024) present expectations for learning and development of children 3 through 5 years old across different domains. When a preschool setting serves children younger than 3 years of age, leaders and other educators should refer to the *Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations* (ITLDF) (CDSS, 2025b), the *Framework for Infant–Toddler Learning and Development* (CDSS, 2025a), and the *Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines* (CDE, 2019a). The Preschool Guidelines complement other resources, such as the Desired Results system, curriculum frameworks, and professional development supports. Together, these resources create an aligned and cohesive early learning and development system to support preschool-aged children in their development.

Preschool settings can use the guidelines in this publication as part of continuous improvement efforts to meet the needs of California's diverse preschool children, families, and communities. The Preschool Guidelines represent developmentally appropriate best practices based on current research in early learning and care. Although the guidelines are not mandatory, they are strongly recommended by CDSS and serve as guidance for best practices in all settings serving preschool-aged children.

For leaders and educators to fully implement the guidelines, they need to have access to resources and supports. However, access can be uneven, and educators may encounter barriers to timely, accessible services. Educators are encouraged to seek guidance, technical assistance, and referral supports from local agencies and networks to help navigate services, access resources, and strengthen coordination with specialists and families. Information on where to access additional resources, such as publications, professional associations, agencies, and networks that support early learning and care professionals are provided throughout this publication.

The Preschool Guidelines complement the California Code of Regulations licensing requirements for child care centers and family child care homes. (To learn more about licensing regulations, visit CDSS's [**Community Care Licensing Child Care Regulations**](#) and [**Family Child Care Regulations**](#).) The guidelines in this publication align with and reflect the guidance shared by other quality improvement resources in California, such as the *Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines* (CDE, 2019a) and the *California Guidelines for Child Care in Home Settings* (currently under revision).

Key Characteristics of High-Quality Preschool Settings

High-quality preschool supports children's learning and development through daily experiences grounded in emotionally connected and responsive relationships, intentional and developmentally appropriate practice, and inclusive environments that promote a sense of belonging and engagement for all children. Research consistently links emotionally supportive and responsive educator-child interactions and learning experiences with stronger social and emotional development, language development, and the development of academic skills. Children benefit most when these practices are consistently implemented and supported through professional development and continuous improvement efforts (Davis Schoch et al., 2023; Farran, 2017; Phillips et al., 2017; Slot, 2018; von Suchodoletz et al., 2023).

The following nine key characteristics encompass the relational, educational, and organization-level features necessary to provide high-quality care and education to preschool-aged children:

- safe, emotionally secure, and welcoming environments
- strong partnerships and collaborations with families
- intentional practices that recognize, value, and support every child
- culturally and linguistically responsive and affirming care and education
- **Universal Design for Learning** and inclusive care and education for children with disabilities
- intentional support for children's learning and development across all domains
- ongoing staff professional development and growth
- active relationships with the broader community
- commitment to continuous improvement

The following overview describes these key characteristics of high-quality preschool settings.

Safe, Emotionally Secure, and Welcoming Environments

Creating safe, emotionally secure, and welcoming spaces for children and their families is essential for the well-being and healthy development of all children (Pacchiano et al., 2019). Physical and emotional safety and well-being are the foundations for creating high-quality preschool settings. Well-maintained indoor and outdoor environments, clear and consistently applied safety rules, and attentive adult supervision help prevent injuries and support children's safe play and learning.

An emotionally healthy climate develops through trusting relationships with educators. Responsive adult-child interactions that include attentive listening, calm guidance, and consistent emotion regulation support and modeling help children feel understood and nurtured (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2021; NAEYC, 2020). Consistent schedules and routines help to establish consistency and a sense of safety for children.

Key Consideration

Preventing Suspension and Expulsion

Exclusionary discipline practices (e.g., suspension, expulsion, repeatedly removing a child from the learning environment) are harmful to young children's development and undermine belonging and learning. Exclusionary disciplinary practices are applied disproportionately, with Black children and boys of color being more likely to experience exclusion than White children (CDE, 2022; Garro et al., 2021; Zinsser et al., 2022).

High-quality preschool settings build staff awareness of **implicit bias** and disproportionality in early childhood discipline across race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and other identities. Educators use that awareness to strengthen prevention and support strategies. Educators can use resources such as the California Early Childhood Online (CECO) module **Creating Brave Spaces: Disrupting Implicit Bias in Early Care and Education** and **Creating Equitable Early Learning Environments for Young Boys of Color** (CDE, 2022) to support reflection on discipline data, implement culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices, and ensure that behavior guidance approaches support children's participation in interactions, routines, and learning activities in the preschool setting.

Physically and emotionally safe and loving environments help children cope with stress and build resilience and are especially important for children who have experienced **trauma**. To support children's well-being effectively, educators' own well-being must be supported. This includes time for self-care and care of staff as a group and access to mental health consultation, all of which are particularly important when educators are caring for children who have experienced trauma (CDE, 2019b). Information on healing, including mental health consultation and self-care for educators to help them better support children who have experienced trauma, can be found in *Trauma and Young Children: Teaching Strategies to Support and Empower* (Erdman et al., 2020), a publication from NAEYC.

Strong Partnerships and Collaboration With Families

High-quality preschool settings engage families as essential partners in children's learning and development. These settings intentionally establish structures and practices that actively encourage, invite, and welcome families. They also create ongoing opportunities for families to share input and communicate with educators in ways that are responsive to families' values, knowledge, and preferences. Being responsive to families means recognizing and honoring the unique combination of strengths, needs, and perspectives of each family (NAEYC, n.d.-b; Rad et al., 2022). To promote a sense of belonging, leaders and educators create welcoming spaces for families by providing announcements and other communications in families' preferred languages with the support of interpreters, staff members who speak the home languages of children and families, and other supports such as translation tools. High-quality settings also attend to families' mental health and psychological safety by creating a respectful climate, protecting confidentiality, and connecting families to culturally and linguistically responsive supports in the community when concerns arise.

All staff in the preschool setting play a key role in establishing and maintaining strong partnerships with families. Establishing authentic, two-way communication with families begins before a child's first day in the preschool setting, during enrollment and initial interviews (Bernard, 2024; NAEYC, 2019). Staff members promote open and respectful communication, welcome family participation in the setting, and ensure that family input is requested and reflected in policies and practices. Educators who work directly with children support family partnerships through daily interactions and relationship-building practices. They listen to families and share observations about children's learning and development while inviting families to contribute their knowledge. Educators and families reflect together,

exchanging perspectives to collaboratively support children’s strengths and address any needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2018).



Leaders seek feedback from families and staff and use that information to inform policies, procedures, and practices. While not every request can be accommodated, responsive leaders balance family perspectives with program requirements, standards for quality, and knowledge of child development. Clear, honest communication helps build trust and shared understanding with families (HHS, 2018).

Through ongoing professional development and **self-reflection**, educators deepen their understanding of their own values and become more open to the diverse perspectives of others (Minkoff, 2020). In preschool settings with strong family partnerships, children benefit from coordinated, supportive relationships across home and school settings (Koralek et al., 2019; Pacchiano et al., 2019).

Intentional Practices That Recognize, Value, and Support Every Child

Equity means everyone receives the support they need to develop well, participate fully with others, and achieve success. As stated in the NAEYC position statement on advancing equity, “All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society” (NAEYC, 2019, p. 1). To provide equitable learning opportunities for all children, high-quality preschool settings create environments where all children and families are welcomed, affirmed, and supported. Educators intentionally design environments, routines, and learning experiences that support each child’s full participation. Materials and activities are selected and adapted so children see themselves, their families, and their communities represented and valued in the setting (NAEYC, 2019; Rad et al., 2022). Educators also use a flexible and responsive approach to meet children where they are developmentally. This includes observing children closely, adapting to each child, and providing support to help each child fully participate and learn. Rather than relying on one approach for all children, educators intentionally adapt instruction, routines, and environments to support individual strengths, interests, abilities, and needs (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Key Consideration

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) refers to approaches that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach that is joyful and engaging. Developmentally appropriate experiences align with children's ages, individual strengths and needs, and cultural and family backgrounds. Young children learn best through developmentally appropriate play, hands-on exploration, and emotionally connected, responsive relationships.

With DAP, growth is supported across key developmental areas, including language and literacy, early math, self-regulation, motor skills, and social-emotional development. It also helps ensure that learning is inclusive and appropriately challenging so children can make progress at their own pace and build confidence.

Intentional teaching is emphasized in DAP—observing and documenting children's learning, using that information to plan and individualize instruction, and providing scaffolds and **adaptations** so all children can participate fully, including dual language learners and children with disabilities. Strong partnerships with families are central to DAP, ensuring that learning goals and approaches reflect family strengths and support continuity between home and school (NAEYC, 2020).

Practicing ongoing self-reflection creates the opportunity for educators to uncover preferences, biases, beliefs, and expectations that may influence their own views on how to support children's learning and development. Educators can use these insights to adjust their interactions, refine teaching strategies, and make intentional changes to the learning environment to better support the learning and development of each child. Awareness of their own perspectives also helps educators effectively partner with families in ways that are responsive to each child's strengths, interests, and needs (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2025). Educators benefit from opportunities to engage in self-reflection with other educators, both within and beyond their own preschool setting. For example, **communities of practice** through a local resource and referral agency or local chapters of professional organizations offer opportunities for connection, introduction to new perspectives and approaches, and feedback that strengthens inclusive, equitable practice.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive and Affirming Care and Education

California's early learning and care settings serve an extraordinarily diverse population of children. Among approximately 2 million children from birth to age 5, 52% are being raised in families that identify as Latino, 23% as White, 13% as Asian, 5% as Black, and less than 1% as American Indian, Alaska Native, or Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; the remaining 6% percent of families identify as one or more race or ethnicity (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2025). In addition, nearly 60% of children aged birth to 5 are in a home where a language other than English is spoken (Habben & Kim, 2025).

In high-quality preschool settings, culturally and linguistically responsive and affirming early learning and care promotes a strong sense of identity and belonging for each child and helps families feel welcomed, respected, and included. When offering culturally and linguistically responsive and affirming early learning and care, educators engage in practices that recognize, value, and build on the **cultures**, languages, and lived experiences of the children and families they serve. For example, leaders and educators communicate with families in ways that are responsive to their values, child-rearing perspectives, and goals for their children (NAEYC, 2020). Approaching conversations with openness and inquiry, asking respectful questions, and listening deeply help educators learn from families' experiences. What educators learn from families informs intentional supports provided for multilingual learners and thoughtful attention to how language is used in the setting (NAEYC, 2020). This includes ensuring that children's home languages and cultures are reflected in daily routines, interactions, and early learning experiences (e.g., through songs, games, stories). For example, an educator asks a family about their child's nap-time routine at home. The family may share that they sing a specific lullaby or say a short prayer in their home language. The educator then incorporates that same routine or an adjusted version of it for rest time to support the child's comfort and continuity.



Culturally and linguistically responsive and affirming care also requires systems that support educators. Professional development, reflective practice, and **reflective supervision** help educators examine their own perspectives, build cultural humility, and

strengthen inclusive practices. When settings embrace cultural diversity and sensitively adapt to families of various cultures, they create a climate of trust and understanding with children and families (NAEYC, 2020).

Key Consideration

Early Experiences With Language

Young children develop and learn foundational language knowledge and skills in the languages and **language varieties** of their homes, communities, and early learning and care settings. In this document, “**multilingual learner**” refers to a child who is learning two or more languages at the same time (CDE, 2024). The term *multilingual learner* may overlap with or be inclusive of other frequently used terms, such as *dual language learner* or *multilingual child*. A dual language learner is a child learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. The term is often used for children from birth through 5 years (NASEM, 2017). “Multilingual child” is another term that can refer to a child who is developing in two or more languages in the context of their family, community, or early learning and care setting (CDSS, 2025b).

Research demonstrates that multilingualism is an asset that affords children linguistic, social, and developmental strengths and serves as a foundation for lifelong learning (NASEM, 2017). Both multilingual learners and children who speak a variety of English, such as African American English or Chicano English, bring language knowledge and skills that support their continued learning and development as they enter early education settings (CDE, 2024). Offering opportunities for children to use all their languages and language varieties in the preschool setting serves as a powerful tool, supporting children’s sense of belonging, bridging connections to their existing knowledge, and fostering deeper ties to their homes and communities. See Guideline 5.1 for information on promoting culturally and linguistically affirming policies and practices and Guideline Area 9 for information about supporting the development of multilingual learners.

Universal Design for Learning and Inclusive Care and Education for Children With Disabilities

Every child in a preschool setting is unique, a testament to the range of ways in which children process information, participate in experiences, and express their knowledge and skills. Preschool settings have a responsibility to nurture each child's strengths and needs, ensuring supportive and inclusive environments. Inclusive environments are intentionally designed to provide interactions, routines, and materials so that children with diverse abilities can meaningfully belong within the preschool setting, engage in learning, and build lasting relationships.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for curriculum and instructional design that helps educators plan learning environments, materials, and experiences that remove barriers and increase access for each child. UDL guides educators through increasing choices and flexible learning options by using strategies aligned with the principles of multiple means of engagement, representation, and action or expression. This ensures that children with diverse abilities, backgrounds, and learning preferences can access learning experiences and demonstrate understanding in ways that work best for them. In high-quality preschool settings, UDL aligns with inclusive, flexible practice by ensuring that environments and routines are meaningful, accessible, and motivating for all children. This inclusive approach honors and validates every child's distinct manner of engaging with people and the physical environment in which to learn (CAST, 2026; Gordon, 2024).

Key Consideration

Definitions

The term **children with disabilities or developmental delays** refers to children who either have been identified as having a disability as defined in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B (aged 3 years through 22 years) or who may be experiencing a developmental delay in areas such as cognitive, physical, communication, social and emotional, or adaptive development as defined in IDEA Part C (ages birth through 3 years). See Guideline Area 8 for information about supporting the development of children with disabilities.

High-quality preschool settings demonstrate a commitment to inclusion when policies and practices support the full participation of children with disabilities, which begins with a culture of rightful presence. “Rightful presence” means educators truly value and foster belonging for all children while some of them receive supports and services through an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** or **Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP)** for children younger than 3 years of age. In this way, inclusion efforts are strengthened by a shared responsibility among all leaders and educators to shift practice to ensure meaningful participation and equitable access to support children with disabilities alongside their peers in the setting (Adams, 2025; SWIFT Education Center, 2025).

Collaboration with families and specialists strengthens inclusive practice by providing a whole picture of a child with insight into their strengths, interests, motivations, communication systems, areas for growth, and individualized supports that promote development. To support timely, coordinated services, educators also benefit from familiarizing themselves with local referral and special education processes, for example, knowing whom to contact, typical timelines for evaluation and planning, and the steps leading to an initial IEP or IFSP meeting. Educators should, with parental consent, consult and collaborate with IEP teams, including speech–language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, vision specialists, and education specialists, to learn about and implement adaptations, including accommodations and modifications, as directed by the student’s IEP or IFSP if the child is younger than 3 years old (Barton et al., 2025; Division for Early Childhood, 2014; Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center & National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2023; U.S. Departments of Education & HHS, 2023).



Intentional Support for Children’s Learning and Development Across All Domains

High-quality preschool settings support children’s learning and development across all domains through the adoption and implementation of a high-quality curriculum that incorporates responsive teaching practices (NAEYC, 2020). Curriculum is defined as “a cohesive set of principles, learning goals, intentional teaching strategies, activities, experiences, and materials designed to help children learn and thrive” (NASEM, 2024, p. 51). The selection and use of curriculum is one of the most significant factors influencing program quality and children’s learning opportunities (Barnett & Espinosa, 2025; Jenkins & Duncan, 2017; NASEM, 2024). The curriculum should be grounded in the program’s mission and vision, be comprehensive of all domains of learning and development, and be aligned with the PTKLF. A description of the domains included in the PTKLF can be found on pages 20–21. The curriculum should also align with other components of the California Early Learning and Development System, such as the frameworks for supporting learning and development.

In high-quality settings, the curriculum is clearly articulated, consistently implemented, and revisited over time. Leaders intentionally create structures for shared planning, observation, feedback, and professional dialogue. These activities enable educators who work directly with children to assess how well the curriculum and teaching practices support learning and development. An ongoing, collaborative approach supports continuous improvement and helps ensure that learning environments remain responsive to children’s strengths, interests, and needs (NAEYC, 2020; Pacchiano et al., 2019).

Educators play a central role in bringing curriculum to life through daily practice. They design rich learning environments with an abundant variety of opportunities to play and explore, observe children closely, plan learning experiences intentionally, and adapt instruction to support individual children and groups of children. Educators use a variety of strategies, such as scaffolding, modeling, open-ended questions, and individualized support, to ensure all children can meaningfully engage in learning experiences. In settings with more than one educator, collaboration among educators strengthens curricular consistency and supports shared responsibility for children’s learning and development (NAEYC, 2020). Overall, as the recent National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s report *A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum* (2024) states: “A well-planned, research-based, and preferably validated curriculum provides an essential scaffold that can guide early childhood educators on what to teach and when; how to engage children; and how to support adaptation for individual, cultural, and linguistic diversity” (p. xix).

The Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations

The *California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations* (CDE, 2024) reflects attention to the whole child, focusing on all aspects of learning and development, including children’s social–emotional and physical development, while also addressing children’s development in areas that map more directly to academic subjects such as mathematics, language and literacy, and science. The foundations offer a comprehensive look at the developing child and what the child learns during the preschool years. Although each domain is individually represented, learning is integrated across all domains. The corresponding resource for children younger than 3 years old is the *California Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations* (CDSS, 2025).

The following nine domains make up the PTKLF:



Approaches to learning describes how children engage in learning, problem-solving, and collaborating with others. These skills include curiosity, initiative, persistence, and executive functions like attention, inhibitory control, and flexibility. The skills developed in the Approaches to Learning domain support successful adjustment to new situations and school settings.



Social and emotional development involves children’s understanding of their emotions, identities, and relationships. Through interactions with adults and peers, children learn to form relationships and manage emotions. They develop an appreciation for differences and a sense of belonging and inclusion.



Language and literacy development is supported through rich interactions with adults and peers. The Language and Literacy Development domain includes information on children’s foundational language development in any language and on English language development for children learning English as an additional language during preschool. Language development includes listening and responding, using language to express ideas and needs, and building vocabulary and grammar. Children develop literacy skills that include awareness of sounds in language, knowledge about letters or characters, and an understanding that print carries meaning. Children also comprehend meaning from stories and informational texts. Strong foundations in oral language and early literacy in any language support later reading, writing, and communication skills.



Mathematics development in preschool reflects children's natural interest in mathematical ideas. Through play and daily interactions, they develop an understanding of number, quantity, shape, size, patterns, and spatial relationships. Experiences with counting, sorting, measuring, and problem-solving build a strong foundation for later mathematics learning and academic success.



Science learning in the preschool years is grounded in young children's natural curiosity about their built and natural environment. They explore objects and events through hands-on exploration, observation, and questioning. These experiences support early scientific thinking and help children build understandings that support their learning over time.



In the **History–Social Science** domain, children make observations and explore their identity and participation in families, schools, and communities. They learn about roles, rules, and shared practices through everyday experiences. These experiences help children understand fairness, belonging, and participation in group life. Children also develop early ideas about time, place, and economic systems.



Physical development includes children's growing ability to control and coordinate their bodies. Children develop movement, balance, and spatial awareness through active play. These skills support exploration, social interaction, physical health, and participation in daily routines.



The **Health** domain focuses on children's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Preschool children learn lifelong habits that support health, including personal care, nutrition, and safety. They also learn behaviors that protect their own health and the health of others.



The **Visual and Performing Arts** domain supports creativity and self-expression. Children engage in and express themselves through visual art, music, dance, and drama during play and creative exploration. Artistic experiences foster imagination, communication, and joy in learning while supporting development across domains.

Ongoing Staff Professional Development and Growth

High-quality preschool settings support staff professional development as an ongoing, intentional process that strengthens teaching practice and promotes continuous improvement. Professional development includes a range of learning opportunities that include training, **coaching**, observation, reflection, and collaboration. These experiences help educators deepen their understanding of



child development, curriculum, and effective instructional strategies and support consistent use of high-quality practices (Phillips et al., 2017; Putcha & Bonsu, 2020; Slot, 2018). For example, professional development focused on developmentally appropriate practice addresses responsive, emotionally connected, and instructionally rich interactions across all domains of learning and development. In addition, learning about trauma, its impact on young children and families, and trauma-informed healing practices supports educators in responding to children with sensitivity and consistency. Professional development can also support educators in using relationship-based, trauma-informed approaches to intentionally build trust with families, especially in communities that have experienced historical and intergenerational trauma that has led to distrust of the educational system (Curenton et al., 2024; Zulauf-McCurdy et al., 2024).

Professional development also prepares educators to implement culturally and linguistically sustaining, affirming, and equitable practices that strengthen children's learning and development. Anti-bias training that offers opportunities for educators and leaders to examine their own beliefs and assumptions is an essential first step in recognizing and disrupting inequities in interactions with children, in curriculum choices, and in policies. High-quality settings also arrange for educators to learn about ways they can support continued development of children's home languages while children are learning an additional language and to engage in practices to create inclusive learning environments that are responsive to each child's unique strengths and needs. Through ongoing reflection and learning, educators strengthen their ability to partner effectively with families in ways that affirm the children's and families' languages, cultures, and lived experiences (NAEYC, 2020). Together, these ongoing, reflective, and collaborative professional development efforts ensure that educators are equipped to provide responsive, inclusive, and high-quality experiences that support the development and well-being of every child (Phillips & Scrinzi, 2024).

Active Relationships With the Broader Community

The role of a high-quality preschool setting often extends beyond early learning and care to supporting all aspects of children’s development, referring families to local services, and contributing to community well-being. Preschool settings are often a trusted source of information for families seeking connections to local services and community organizations (NASEM, 2025). Through collaboration with community-based organizations and agencies, preschool settings build networks of support for children and families. These partnerships help ensure that services are coordinated, accessible, and aligned with family strengths and needs (NASEM, 2025). For example, a preschool setting may connect with professionals and agencies across early childhood, health, social services, and special education to help families more easily access services. Health and social service professionals may offer resources and assistance to families. Their services may also include partnering directly with educators to support children’s learning and development in the preschool setting, the community, or both.

Local elementary schools are a key community partner for the preschool setting, particularly around supporting continuity and alignment as children move from preschool settings into the early elementary grades. Connections between local elementary school and preschool settings support shared expectations, coordinated practices, and smoother transitions for children and families across programs and settings (NAEYC, 2019; Phillips & Scrinzi, 2024). For children with identified disabilities, preschool settings collaborate closely with families around children’s transition into preschool, whether children are entering group care for the first time, moving from another early learning setting, or transitioning from early intervention (IDEA Part C) to preschool special education (IDEA Part B). For children with IEPs, this collaboration includes coordinating with service providers and the IEP teams and, when available, partnering with local family resource or family empowerment centers to help families navigate and feel supported through the transition.

Leaders and other educators in all preschool settings collaborate on an ongoing basis with regulatory agencies, including the CDSS Community Care Licensing Division. In addition, high-quality preschool settings also engage in efforts to promote quality standards and policies that support children, families, and the early learning workforce. These efforts contribute to strengthening and improving early childhood systems both within and beyond the local community (BUILD Initiative, 2023; Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

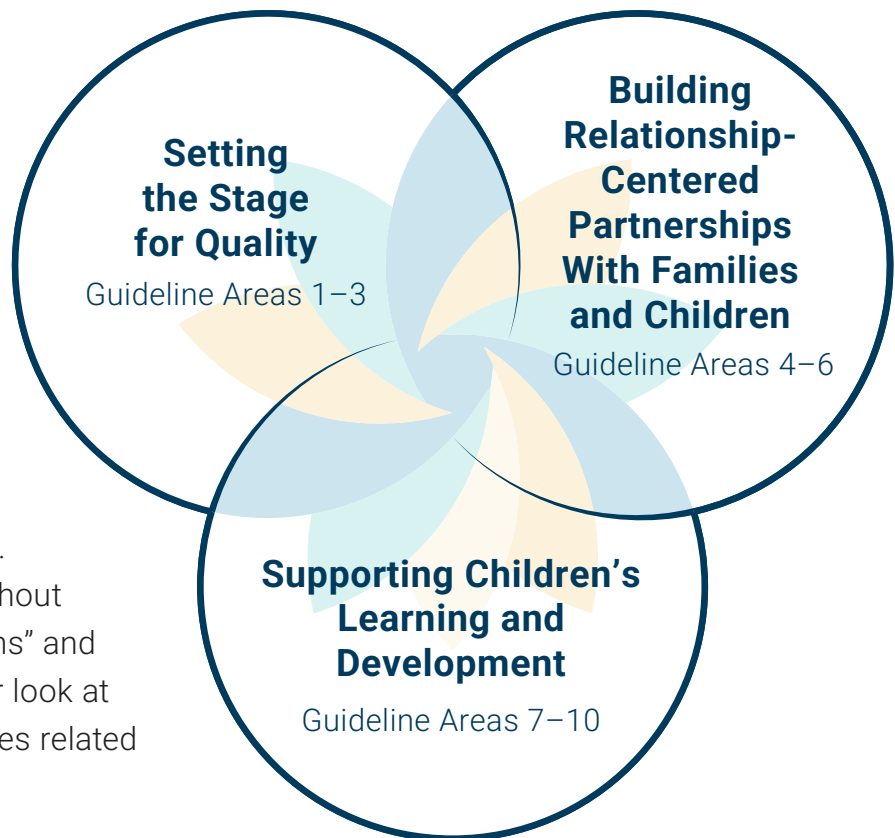
High-quality preschool settings engage in continuous improvement to sustain and strengthen program quality. Continuous improvement includes regularly reflecting on practices, getting feedback from families and staff, using multiple sources of information to understand how well the setting is meeting its goals, and identifying areas for growth. Time for reflection, planning, and collaboration is essential and supports decision-making aligned with the setting's philosophy, curriculum, and goals (NASEM, 2024; Tout et al., 2015).

A shared understanding of quality is central to continuous improvement. Many high-quality preschool settings use well-established frameworks and standards to guide reflection and assess practices. NAEYC's [Early Childhood Program Standards](#) describe research-based expectations for quality across 10 broad domains of program functioning. These standards provide a common language and structure for examining practice, setting improvement goals, and supporting consistent, high-quality experiences for children and families. The Division for Early Childhood [Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education](#) and the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center and National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations' [Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion](#) describe standards for inclusive preschool settings. The [Multilingual Learning Toolkit](#) and [Personalized Oral Language Learning Strategies](#) include resources and best practices for settings serving multilingual learners. To track implementation of standards and recommended practices and guide implementation efforts in specific areas, settings may use valid and reliable program assessment tools.

Continuous improvement is a shared responsibility. Leaders and staff members contribute through ongoing reflection on practice, participation in coaching and professional development, and collaboration with families and community partners. This shared responsibility may require creativity and perseverance to ensure everyone is able to contribute. For example, offer flexible meeting options, ensure that interpreters are available, and use translation tools when appropriate so everyone can meaningfully participate in continuous improvement. When leaders and staff members regularly reflect, plan, and seek to improve their practices, they strengthen the overall quality of the setting and their support of children's learning and development (Davis Schoch et al., 2023; Putcha & Bonsu, 2020).

Overview of the Guidelines

The upcoming thematic sections—Setting the Stage for Quality, Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families and Children, and Supporting Children’s Learning and Development—present guidance on planning, creating, and maintaining high-quality preschool settings. Each thematic section includes three to four guideline areas that address key topics that leaders, educators, and staff should consider. Each guideline area includes three to six guidelines that provide more detailed guidance, naming specific practices and including examples. Although the guidelines are numbered into guideline areas, the numbering does not communicate order of importance. In fact, as the figure below illustrates, the content of the three sections—Setting the Stage for Quality (Guideline Areas 1 through 3), Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families and Children (Guideline Areas 4 through 6), and Supporting Children’s Learning and Development (Guideline Areas 7 through 10)—could be thought of as intersecting circles with overlapping guidance while mainly addressing unique aspects of practice. Throughout the Preschool Guidelines, in-practice examples offer brief descriptions of the guidelines in action in the context of a preschool setting. Pullout boxes are used throughout to highlight “Key Considerations” and “Definitions” and offer a closer look at important concepts or practices related to the guidelines.



Setting the Stage for Quality

The thematic section on setting the stage for quality includes guidelines on building a high-quality setting, promoting children's health, safety, and nutrition, and supporting staff well-being. Grounded in child development knowledge, it recommends policies and practices that center the individuality, cultures, languages, and lived experiences of children and families. Continuous reflection, ethical leadership, and collaboration ensure the program's stability, responsiveness, and positive impact (Graves et al., 2026; NAEYC, 2019; Rad et al., 2022). Children's health, safety, and nutrition are supported through well-designed physical environments, consistent routines, and daily practices that promote well-being and a sense of security. Equally important, high-quality settings invest in staff well-being and ongoing professional development, including establishing equitable systems of support for all staff, recognizing that staff who feel supported, valued, and prepared are better able to create nurturing, responsive environments for children and families (Narea et al., 2022; NASEM, 2025).



Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families and Children

The thematic section on relationships with families and children includes guidelines related to engaging with families in responsive and collaborative way, affirming the lived experiences and cultures of families and children, and placing relationships at the center of care and learning to promote children's well-being. Responsive and mutually respectful relationships with families are central to high-quality preschool experiences.



Educators build trust by honoring families' knowledge of their children and communicating openly and respectfully. These relationships support children's sense of belonging and security. They also strengthen partnerships with families, ensuring that care and learning are responsive to children's cultural backgrounds, strengths, and individual needs (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020; Pacchiano et al., 2019).

Supporting Children's Learning and Development

The thematic section on supporting the learning and development of children covers guidelines related to curriculum, to supporting multilingual learners, to supporting children with disabilities, and to assessment. Developmentally appropriate curriculum and assessment ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, engaging, and aligned with how young children develop and learn. Educators in high-quality preschool settings implement a curriculum through responsive interactions, play-based teaching practices, and planned experiences that support learning across domains. They build on children's home languages, language varieties, and communication styles, providing multiple ways for children to express understanding and participate in learning. Educators also implement UDL and inclusive practices that are responsive to each child's strengths and needs. For children with disabilities or developmental delays, educators provide additional supports and collaborate with specialized service providers. Ongoing observation and reflection are key to how educators respond to children's cues and adjust teaching practice to support children's progress.

Overall, the information provided across the 10 guideline areas offers comprehensive guidance on policies and practices that, when implemented, will establish a solid foundation for high-quality preschool experiences for children.



Closing

This resource addresses what it takes to create and sustain high-quality preschool experiences that are powerful and far-reaching. In these settings, nurturing relationships and interactions, respectful partnerships with families, responsive teaching practices, and inclusive environments support children’s learning, development, and well-being. Leaders and other educators and staff members respect and welcome each child and family, affirm diverse cultures and languages, and promote a strong sense of belonging. When these practices are consistently implemented, children benefit through stronger social and emotional development, increased engagement in learning, and growth in language and early academic skills. These early experiences also lay a foundation for learning and development beyond the preschool years (Davis Schoch et al., 2023; Phillips et al., 2017; von Suchodoletz et al., 2023).

Quality is sustained through intentional leadership, professional development, and systems that support educators in their work through continuous improvement efforts. Together, this resource’s recommended policies and practices create preschool settings in which educators and staff are well supported and children thrive.



To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS California Early Childhood Online (CECO), <https://www.caearlychildhoodonline.org/>
- » CDSS California Early Childhood Online (CECO) - Creating Brave Spaces: Disrupting Implicit Bias in Early Care and Education, https://www.caearlychildhoodonline.org/en_modulecatalog.aspx?moduleId=1152
- » CDSS Community Care Licensing Child Care Regulations, <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-regulations/legislation-and-regulations/community-care-licensing-regulations/child-care>
- » CDSS Dual Language Learners Professional Development, <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/child-care-and-nutrition/specialized-programs/child-development/resources/dual-language-learners-professional-development-child-development>
- » CDSS Family Child Care Regulations, <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-regulations/legislation-and-regulations/community-care-licensing-regulations/family-child-care>
- » CDSS Framework for Infant–Toddler Learning and Development, https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CCDD/IT_Framework_ENGLISH_ADA%2012.29.25.pdf
- » CDSS Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations, <https://californiaearlylearninganddevelopment.org/educators/infant-toddler/foundations/>
- » CDE Creating Equitable Early Learning Environments for Young Boys of Color, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/boysofcolor.pdf>
- » CDE Dual Language Learner (DLL) Support, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/dllsupport.asp>
- » CDE Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/itguidelines2nded2019.pdf>

- » CDE Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>
- » Child Development Training Consortium Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP), <https://www.childdevelopment.org/higher-ed-faculty/curriculum-alignment-project>
- » Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children Recommended Practices, <https://divisionearlychildhood.egnyte.com/dl/7urLPWCt5U>
- » Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center and National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations' Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion, <https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/indicators.asp>
- » Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>
- » Multilingual Learning Toolkit, <https://www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org/>
- » NAEYC Advancing Equity Position Statement, <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity-position>
- » NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards, <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/early-childhood-program-standards>
- » NASEM: A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/27429>
- » Personalized Oral Language Learning (POLL) Strategies, <https://www.pollstrategies.org/strategies-index/>
- » Universal Design for Learning, <https://www.cast.org/>
- » U.S. Departments of Education and HHS Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children With Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs, <https://headstart.gov/publication/policy-statement-inclusion-children-disabilities-early-childhood-programs>

Guidelines at a Glance

Setting the Stage for Quality

• **Guideline Area 1: Building a High-Quality Preschool Setting**

- **Guideline 1.1.** Develop and uphold a written philosophy statement grounded in knowledge of child development and reflecting the priorities and needs of the children and families being served.
- **Guideline 1.2.** Use knowledge of child development to create and implement policies and practices that support children's learning and development based on their individual backgrounds, strengths, and needs.
- **Guideline 1.3.** Embrace an approach that reflects a commitment to equity and anti-bias practices.
- **Guideline 1.4.** Uphold ethical standards and foster shared leadership to enhance quality and professionalism.
- **Guideline 1.5.** Pursue continuous improvement through ongoing reflection, evaluation, and adaptation.
- **Guideline 1.6.** Learn from and contribute to the early childhood education profession through collaborating with groups informing early childhood policy.

• **Guideline Area 2: Promoting Children's Health, Safety, and Nutrition**

- **Guideline 2.1.** Support the physical health and well-being of all children.
- **Guideline 2.2.** Support children's mental health.
- **Guideline 2.3.** Ensure the safety of all children.
- **Guideline 2.4.** Promote children's healthy nourishment.

• **Guideline Area 3: Supporting Staff Well-Being and Professional Learning**

- **Guideline 3.1.** Create and maintain an optimal working environment to attract and retain well-qualified staff.
- **Guideline 3.2.** Develop and implement policies and practices that support staff well-being and mental health.
- **Guideline 3.3.** Support ongoing reflective practice, coaching, and mentoring.
- **Guideline 3.4.** Develop and implement a comprehensive, ongoing plan for professional development.

Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families and Children

- **Guideline Area 4: Engaging With Families in Responsive and Collaborative Ways**
 - **Guideline 4.1.** Create a welcoming environment that promotes a sense of belonging.
 - **Guideline 4.2.** Engage in meaningful two-way communication with families.
 - **Guideline 4.3.** Collaborate with families as partners in supporting children's learning and transitions to early elementary school.
 - **Guideline 4.4.** Support and advocate for families and leverage community resources.
- **Guideline Area 5: Affirming the Cultures and Lived Experiences of Children and Families**
 - **Guideline 5.1.** Promote culturally and linguistically affirming policies and practices.
 - **Guideline 5.2.** Promote equity and inclusion in practices and interactions among children.
 - **Guideline 5.3.** Support understanding of the impact of trauma and implementation of trauma-informed strategies and practices.
- **Guideline Area 6: Centering Relationships in Early Learning and Care Settings to Promote Children's Well-Being**
 - **Guideline 6.1.** Orient practice around the understanding that children's development and learning is grounded in relationships.
 - **Guideline 6.2.** Ensure that all young children in the setting experience nurturing, emotionally connected relationships.
 - **Guideline 6.3.** Adopt a social and emotional learning (SEL) approach that promotes educators' and children's social and emotional competence and well-being.
 - **Guideline 6.4.** Provide guidance to set developmentally appropriate expectations for children's behavior and establish behavioral supports.

Supporting Children's Learning and Development

• **Guideline Area 7: Planning the Curriculum and the Learning Environment**

- **Guideline 7.1.** Establish an environment that is predictable and supportive and promotes a sense of belonging and community for everyone.
- **Guideline 7.2.** Organize and prepare indoor and outdoor environments to support children's learning and development.
- **Guideline 7.3.** Offer developmentally appropriate materials that encourage play, exploration, and learning in all domains.
- **Guideline 7.4.** Establish routines and schedules that are predictable while also flexible to meet the interests and needs of individual children.
- **Guideline 7.5.** Engage in a collaborative curriculum planning process that includes observation, documentation, and reflection on children's learning and development.
- **Guideline 7.6.** Plan learning experiences across developmental domains based on knowledge of child development and the individual strengths and needs of children.

• **Guideline Area 8: Supporting the Learning and Development of Children With Disabilities**

- **Guideline 8.1.** Collaborate with families, individuals with disabilities, and community partners to establish a shared purpose for serving children with disabilities and their families.
- **Guideline 8.2.** Work closely in partnership with families and provide them with information on community resources and support that relates to the child's disability.
- **Guideline 8.3.** Develop and implement policies and practices that meet legal requirements related to inclusion.
- **Guideline 8.4.** Ensure that educators have the necessary time, training, information, and support to fully participate on Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 teams with families and specialized service providers.
- **Guideline 8.5.** Implement appropriate modifications in the curriculum, instructional methods, and learning environments to ensure a sense of belonging and full participation by children with disabilities.
- **Guideline 8.6.** Provide appropriate supports for multilingual learners with disabilities in collaboration with specialized service providers such as education specialists and therapists.

- **Guideline Area 9: Supporting the Learning and Development of Multilingual Learners**

- **Guideline 9.1.** Promote the continued development of the child's home language, recognizing multilingualism as an asset.
- **Guideline 9.2.** Partner with families to support children's multilingual development.
- **Guideline 9.3.** Provide additional support for children's English language development and full participation in learning experiences when English is the language of instruction.
- **Guideline 9.4.** Use appropriate assessment tools and practices for multilingual learners.

- **Guideline Area 10: Assessing Children's Learning and Development**

- **Guideline 10.1.** Establish policies and procedures that support high-quality, ongoing assessment of all children.
- **Guideline 10.2.** Engage in authentic, ongoing observational assessment to document each child's learning and development.
- **Guideline 10.3.** Use developmental screenings with all young children and collaborate with families in the referral process.
- **Guideline 10.4.** Use observation and assessment findings to inform the planning and implementation of learning experiences.
- **Guideline 10.5.** Communicate with families about observations and assessments and provide opportunities for families to contribute to the assessment process.



Setting the Stage for Quality

Guideline Area 1: Building a High-Quality Preschool Setting

Establishing a high-quality preschool setting requires a shared vision grounded in **developmentally appropriate, inclusive practices** and a deep understanding of the priorities and needs of the community (Rad et al., 2022). When educators, families, and community partners engage in an intentional, collaborative process to develop the setting's vision, everyone in the preschool setting benefits. A written philosophy statement details the setting's vision, helps define shared values, and shapes the overall climate and direction of the setting (Graves et al., 2026). This shared vision guides day-to-day operations as well as long-term planning.

Building and sustaining a high-quality preschool setting requires putting in place policies and practices that are informed by current knowledge of child development and are responsive to the children, families, and communities being served (Burchinal et al., 2021; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020). Practices must recognize and affirm each child's strengths, cultural and linguistic background, and individual interests. When settings build trusting relationships with families and communities and reinforce a sense of shared commitment over time, they provide an environment in which each child can flourish. Settings establish this environment through inclusive and culturally responsive and affirming practices. For example, they provide families with opportunities for meaningful participation and communicate information in a variety of formats and languages (Frost & Goldberg, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2016).

Key Consideration

Definitions

The term **leader** refers to an educator who has leadership and administrative responsibilities for operating a preschool setting, including family child care homes and center-based and school-based early learning and care settings. Leaders include operators of small or large family child care homes; directors or administrators of single-site or multisite settings; and others who have similar responsibilities.

The term **educator** refers to individuals, including leaders, responsible for the early learning and care of children in preschool settings. Educators include family child care providers, teachers, assistants, aides, substitutes, education specialists, education coordinators, and others with similar responsibilities.

The terms **staff** and **staff member** refer to all individuals employed or self-employed in family child care homes and in center-based and school-based early learning and care settings. This includes leaders, educators, and other staff (e.g., program specialists, administrative support staff, family engagement coordinators, cooks, bus drivers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists) who contribute to the early learning and care of children.

Foundational support structures are essential for effective practice. These structures include adequate staffing, protected time for planning and reflection, and ongoing professional development. Together, these supports strengthen educators' ability to build broad knowledge of child development, implement effective educational strategies, and partner with families and communities. Arranging for ongoing professional development for educators ensures that their practices remain research-informed and responsive to evolving community needs, further strengthening quality (NAEYC, 2025b; Phillips et al., 2017).

A commitment to anti-bias practices is fundamental to cultivating inclusive, equitable preschool settings that foster welcoming environments and a sense of belonging for children and families from all backgrounds. Ensuring that every child feels seen, heard, and valued requires that settings intentionally implement equitable, anti-bias practices that respond to the identities and lived experiences of all children and families (Atha, 2025; Derman-Sparks et al., 2020; Graves et al., 2026; NAEYC, 2019; Rad et al., 2022). By affirming every child's and family's inherent value and belonging, preschool settings can advance rightful presence—the idea that children and families are not “guests” who must

earn entry, but rightful members with voice and influence (Adams, 2025; SWIFT Education Center, 2025).

Prioritizing reflective practice and continuous improvement, seeking out professional development, and working to advance the field of early childhood education help those in leadership roles maintain stability and encourage innovative, responsive preschool settings. These leadership practices strengthen individual settings while also contributing to broader statewide efforts focused on equity and excellence. Together, they highlight the essential role that early childhood educators play in advancing positive outcomes for California's young children and families (NAEYC, 2019).

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 1 is provided below.

Guideline Area 1

Building a High-Quality Preschool Setting

- **Guideline 1.1.** Develop and uphold a written philosophy statement grounded in knowledge of child development and reflecting the priorities and needs of the children and families being served.
- **Guideline 1.2.** Use knowledge of child development to create and implement policies and practices that support children's learning and development based on their individual backgrounds, strengths, and needs.
- **Guideline 1.3.** Embrace an approach that reflects a commitment to equity and anti-bias practices.
- **Guideline 1.4.** Uphold ethical standards and foster shared leadership to enhance quality and professionalism.
- **Guideline 1.5.** Pursue continuous improvement through ongoing reflection, evaluation, and adaptation.
- **Guideline 1.6.** Learn from and contribute to the early childhood education profession through collaborating with groups informing early childhood policy.

Guideline 1.1. Develop and uphold a written philosophy statement grounded in knowledge of child development and reflecting the priorities and needs of the children and families being served.

-  **Partner with families, community members, and staff to develop a written philosophy statement.** A philosophy statement typically begins by describing a setting's mission (its current purpose and aims) and vision (its desired future direction), then articulates the core beliefs and values that guide why a setting does what it does and how it carries out its work. It is grounded in research-based knowledge of child development and reflects shared values and community priorities. Leaders create opportunities such as listening sessions or a short questionnaire to gather input from families and community members. Incorporating their input contributes to a philosophy statement that is accurate, relevant, and reflective of the strengths and values of the families and the community served.
-  **Ensure the philosophy statement is accessible and available in all languages spoken by the families.** Post the statement in prominent locations, include it in family handbooks, and share it during orientations and meetings. Making it available to everyone in multiple ways supports inclusivity and contributes to a shared understanding among educators, families, and communities of what guides the preschool setting.
-  **Use the philosophy statement as a foundational tool for informing goals, decisions, policies, and everyday practices in the preschool setting.** Refer to the philosophy statement when considering new curricula, introducing changes to routines, or evaluating setting effectiveness to maintain consistency with core beliefs and commitments. For example, the philosophy statement can guide new family engagement strategies, such as implementing family forums or adjusting communication methods, to ensure that these strategies reflect and support the setting's stated values and priorities.
-  **Review and update the philosophy statement regularly and in collaboration with staff, families, and community partners to respond to evolving needs, research findings, or changes within the community.** Structured opportunities for feedback, such as annual reviews or family input sessions, help keep the statement relevant and responsive to children's developmental needs and family priorities.



In-Practice Example: Updating a Family Child Care Home's Philosophy Statement

Marisol runs a family child care home (FCCH) and has seen her enrollment shifting to include an increase in young 3-year-olds and older 2-year-olds transitioning from infant–toddler care settings. As she revises her family handbook, she decides it is a good time to significantly revise her philosophy statement so it clearly conveys her approach to caring for children.

Marisol starts by reviewing NAEYC guidance on developmentally appropriate practice. Next, she reflects on the families and community she serves—their typical work schedules, languages used at home, and caregiving routines and preferences. On one side of a paper, she writes key words for how she wants her setting to feel and function: *respect, belonging, partnerships with families, relationships first*, and *nurturing, responsive care*. On the other side, she lists what families say they need right now: *consistent routines, clear communication, support with social and emotional skills*, and *help with the transition to a new setting*.

Marisol reads a few philosophy statements to help her find the right tone and notices how they all communicate a clear view of the child and a commitment to inclusion. Using her two lists, she drafts a short statement describing all children as capable learners and describing learning as happening through play, interactions, and strong relationships. She writes the philosophy statement in English and Spanish and formats it in bullet points to make it easier to read. After getting feedback from her FCCH community of practice, she posts a copy of the statement near the sign-in table. She invites families to read the new statement and ask questions and makes plans to discuss it at the next family meeting.

Guideline 1.2. Use knowledge of child development to create and implement policies and practices that support children’s learning and development based on their individual backgrounds, strengths, and needs.

Stay informed on current research in children’s learning and development.

This can be done by participating in professional development, reading trusted early childhood resources, and learning from colleagues. Engage in discussions of child development research with educators and arrange opportunities for them to expand their knowledge of early development. For example, the [California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations](#) and [Preschool Through Third Grade \(P–3\) Learning Progressions](#) can be used to guide effective planning and practice. When a setting also serves children younger than 3 years old, refer to such resources as the [California Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations](#) and [California Framework for Infant–Toddler Learning and Development](#). Arrange for learning opportunities on important topics like relationships with children and families, multilingual development, risk and **resilience**, brain development, and disabilities and developmental delays.

Share child development research with families and learn from them about their children. Regularly engage in conversations with families about child development knowledge and their insights into their children’s development. Use this information to guide support for children’s growth across all domains while affirming each child’s language, culture, family, and community.

Stay informed about research on curriculum, intentional teaching, and inquiry-based learning. Weave research insights into the setting’s approach to routines, interactions, and planned learning experiences. With input from families and community members, engage in ongoing curriculum planning informed by children’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This helps make learning experiences meaningful for children and families.

-  **Use knowledge of child development to implement developmentally appropriate policies and practices that respond to each child’s individual strengths, interests, and needs.** Inclusive policies and practices foster an environment in which every child’s unique development is supported and valued. When needed, consult with specialists for technical assistance in areas such as speech and language development and inclusion strategies.
-  **Emphasize learning through play as part of developmentally appropriate practice.** Young children learn and develop primarily through play. Balance adult-led activities and children’s self-directed play throughout the day’s learning experiences. Arrange for professional development for oneself and other educators that highlights the role of play in children’s learning and development, including professional development around [The Powerful Role of Play in Early Education](#).

Key Consideration

Anti-Bias Education and Practices

The four goals of **anti-bias education** are to support children’s development of a confident sense of identity, a comfort with diversity, a sense of fairness and justice, and the ability to stand up for themselves and for others. Educators integrate anti-bias goals into their planned activities and lessons as well as during teachable learning moments throughout the day. Anti-bias practices in early childhood education settings are intentional teaching practices and interactions designed to affirm each child’s social identity, celebrate human diversity, and actively challenge prejudices, stereotypes, and unfair treatment. These practices create equitable learning environments where children feel seen, respected, and empowered to recognize and respond to bias in themselves and others. Rooted in equity principles, anti-bias efforts support positive identity development and help young learners build the skills to act fairly and inclusively with peers and their communities (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020).

Guideline 1.3. Embrace an approach that reflects a commitment to equity and anti-bias practices.

- ✿ **Dedicate regular time for individual and collective reflection.** Focus on children's, families', and educators' experiences, as well as their backgrounds, languages, and cultures. Include time to plan ways to create welcoming, affirming environments committed to equity. This can include discussions and shared reflection about cultural perspectives and behaviors, along with reflection time for individuals to uncover and change actions stemming from **implicit bias** (Collado et al., 2025).
- ✿ **Include in the setting's written philosophy statement policies that reflect the priorities and experiences of the children and families in the community.** Regularly involve families and educators in setting programmatic goals and adapting the setting's philosophy statement. Update the philosophy statement as needed to include policies that support all children.



- 
Ensure that policies and practices demonstrate a commitment to equitable outcomes for all children. Regularly review policies and practices to identify whether they unintentionally advantage some children or families over others. Revise policies to promote equitable access, participation, and outcomes. Use multiple sources of information, including family input, to assess whether policies are supporting all children in ways that are fair, inclusive, and responsive.
- 
Implement anti-bias practices to help children recognize and question bias and unfairness. Create opportunities for children to learn about themselves, their families, and their communities to strengthen children's sense of self in a multiracial society. Adopt a flexible approach to implementing a curriculum that allows for child- and educator-initiated learning experiences around topics of identity, diversity, fairness, and empowerment. These opportunities also support children in learning about others' identities and backgrounds.
- 
Create a sense of community within the setting that centers an equity, strengths-based approach. This includes intentionally engaging in activities that build community among the children. These activities also teach children about fairness and help them support one another in celebrating similarities and differences and accessing individual supports.
- 
Build on the cultural and linguistic experiences and abilities children bring with them. Draw from children's lived experiences and their cultural, family, and community knowledge to plan meaningful and engaging experiences, topics, and investigations. Children connect more deeply when learning experiences relate to their own identities and lived experiences. See Guideline Area 5 for more information on affirming the cultures and lived experiences of children and families.

Guideline 1.4. Uphold ethical standards and foster shared leadership to enhance quality and professionalism.

-  **Cultivate shared leadership among educators and other interest holders in planning and evaluation, setting annual goals, and engaging in curriculum planning.** Establish and maintain ongoing collaboration, open communication, transparency about budgets, accountability requirements, and, in settings with employed staff, hiring and staffing policies. Collaborating as a team and engaging in shared decision-making help everyone working in the setting participate in creating a high-quality environment, which includes the setting's social and emotional climate.

-  **Set clear expectations for professionalism and ethical behavior.** The [NAEYC Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators](#), for example, provides clear expectations for individuals working in early learning and care settings. Model and reinforce expectations to foster trust and respect among children, families, and other educators in the setting. Expectations for professionalism and ethical behavior also guide everyday operational decisions. Consider each individual's ethical responsibilities toward children, families, colleagues and employees, and the surrounding community.

- ✿ **Collaborate in creating a productive and safe workplace environment.** Facilitate practices that promote one's own and other staff members' health, well-being, and supportive relationships with children and their families. For example, support staff in maintaining professional boundaries in relationships with children and families. These boundaries help protect the integrity of interactions and ensure that staff members operate within appropriate limits. See Guideline Area 3 for more information on supporting staff well-being.

Key Consideration

Engaging in Sound Business Practices to Support Stability and Consistency

Building a high-quality preschool setting includes engaging in sound business practices that support stability and consistency. These practices include reviewing record-keeping data—such as financial records, enrollment and attendance records, staffing records, and an inventory of materials—to ensure that they comply with funding and regulatory requirements. Leaders also collaborate with interest holders and, in settings with multiple staff members, other staff to develop financial goals, identify funding sources, and meet reporting requirements. A stable and consistent business environment enables educators and staff to focus their time and energy on providing high-quality interactions and learning experiences for children.

Guideline 1.5. Pursue continuous improvement through ongoing reflection, evaluation, and adaptation.

-  **Set annual improvement goals and align resources to meet them.** Work with families, staff, regulatory agencies, and community partners to identify clear, measurable goals. Consider and address factors that create barriers to families' full participation in planning meetings, such as location, time, or languages in which meetings are conducted. Engaging in collaborative goal setting can strengthen alignment between the preschool setting and the families being served. It can also sustain engagement and ensure that progress is assessed regularly.
-  **Use input from others to improve policies and practices.** Gather input regularly from families and, in settings with more than one educator, from other staff members. This input might be gathered through family surveys, staff surveys, child outcomes, or ongoing discussions. Use this input to implement changes in a respectful and transparent manner, ensuring that everyone is informed about new developments. This approach builds trust and ensures that any changes reflect the needs and perspectives of the community. Based on input, develop policies to promote practices that address the diverse strengths and needs of children and families.





In-Practice Example: Reflecting and Adapting to Meet the Needs of the Setting and the Community

Following recent reports of a food-borne illness in the community, a center-based preschool decides to change its policy on sharing food prepared at home. The new policy states that families are not permitted to share food prepared at home at events held at the center. The center informs families of the new policy in their weekly newsletter.

Several families are upset that the decision was made without their input. Some also express concern that the policy undermines the program's philosophy statement and goal of creating community. They note that previous Family Nights, where food was shared, brought families together and sparked conversations that led to closer relationships.

Wanting to work toward a solution that reflects their core values, the center leadership reflects on the program's philosophy statement and acknowledges their error in not seeking family input before changing the policy. They invite families to share their concerns and suggestions and, together with educators and staff, review the feedback to better understand both health and community priorities.

Recognizing the importance of sharing food and cultural traditions while also addressing health and safety concerns, educators decide that each room will invite a family member to prepare a dish with the children in the room to be shared at an upcoming family night. The center works with the families to ensure access to needed ingredients and cooking utensils, and some families bring specialty equipment or tools to support the preparation of authentic dishes.

Guideline 1.6. Learn from and contribute to the early childhood education profession through collaborating with groups informing early childhood policy.

-  **Connect with others in the field to pursue ways of improving the early childhood education profession and high-quality systems for young children.** Participate in professional associations, community networks, and groups that inform policy on early childhood education. These networks can provide access to diverse perspectives, current research, and knowledge of new or pending legislation that will impact regulatory requirements.
-  **Support continuous improvement within the early childhood education profession and model collaborative practices by engaging in local and regional initiatives.** Participation in local and regional initiatives, such as quality improvement projects, Local Planning Councils, task forces, or groups that inform policy, enables those in leadership roles to share expertise, learn from peers, and strengthen the early learning system as a whole. Collaborative initiatives with community agencies help build relationships and strengthen everyone's capacity, contributing to improved outcomes for children and families.
-  **Utilize research, data, and practical knowledge to advocate for organizational change in early childhood education.** Sharing evidence-based practices and real-world examples helps communicate the need for improvements and address barriers to change. This comprehensive approach enables educators to contribute within their own settings as well as contribute to broader efforts, ultimately raising the quality of early learning and care for preschool-aged children across California.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS Framework for Infant–Toddler Learning and Development, https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CCDD/IT_Framework_ENGLISH_ADA%2012.29.25.pdf
- » CDSS Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations, <https://californiaearlylearninganddevelopment.org/educators/infant-toddler/foundations/>
- » CDE Impact Inclusion Workgroup’s mission statement, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/op/impactinclusionworkgroup.asp>
- » CDE Preschool Through Third Grade (P–3) Learning Progressions, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/p3/>
- » CDE Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>
- » CDE The Powerful Role of Play in Early Education, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/powerfulroleofplay.pdf>
- » California Association for the Education of Young Children, <https://caeyc.org/>
- » Early Edge California, <https://earlyedgecalifornia.org/>
- » EveryChild California, <https://www.everychildca.org/>
- » NAEYC Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators, https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-174467/code_of_ethics_for_early_childhood_educators_final_1.pdf

Page left intentionally blank

Guideline Area 2: Promoting Children's Health, Safety, and Nutrition

Supporting children's physical and mental health, safety, and nutrition is essential to early development. Experiences such as responsive caregiving, safe environments, and adequate nutrition promote healthy brain development and strengthen the systems that underlie attention, memory, and self-regulation. When children's basic health and safety needs are met, they are better able to engage in learning experiences, build relationships, and explore their environment (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2019; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020).

Promoting young children's mental health works hand in hand with supporting their social and emotional development and overall well-being. Mental health is promoted in the preschool years through supporting the development of social and emotional skills, including a child's ability to express and manage their emotions, build and maintain trusting relationships, explore, and learn. Like all other aspects of development, strong connections to their family and community support children's mental health. In the preschool setting, a well-designed physical environment and thoughtfully implemented routines and learning experiences can strengthen children's social and emotional development and relationships. Importantly, stable and consistent routines enable children to feel secure as they explore their environment and try new experiences with others (Hancock & Carter, 2016; Selman & Dilworth-Bart, 2024).

California's licensing requirements set a baseline for ensuring the safety of children in preschool settings. In creating a high-quality preschool setting, leaders and other educators build on the basic licensing requirements to implement physical environments and routines that keep children safe and prevent accidents and injuries.

Another important aspect of promoting children's physical health is nutrition, which is strongly tied to family preferences and children's individual health needs. Whether the preschool setting provides food or families provide their own, leaders and other educators in preschool settings establish policies and practices to promote young children's healthy nourishment.

Key Consideration

The Preschool Guidelines and Regulatory Requirements

While the guidelines in this document describe best practices for all high-quality preschool settings, every program or setting should refer to the relevant licensing regulations for a detailed and up-to-date description of requirements. See California's [Community Care Licensing Regulations](#) for related regulatory requirements, including Title 22 and Title 5 of the [California Code of Regulations](#) as applicable. Different setting types, such as Head Start programs, may also have additional programmatic requirements.

Title 22 regulations, administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), establish the basic health, safety, and supervisory requirements for all licensed child care facilities, regardless of funding source. Title 5 programs are state subsidized to serve eligible low-income families. These settings must meet both Title 22 licensing requirements and additional Title 5 program quality standards. Understanding whether a setting operates under Title 22 or Title 5 is important because it affects curriculum, documentation, and reporting requirements, as well as funding. When a setting operates under both Title 22 and Title 5, the setting must adhere to the stricter of the two requirements.

The guidelines below describe effective practices for high-quality settings serving children and families and build on licensing regulations.

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 2 is provided below.

Guideline Area 2

Promoting Children's Health, Safety, and Nutrition

- **Guideline 2.1.** Support the physical health and well-being of all children.
- **Guideline 2.2.** Support children's mental health.
- **Guideline 2.3.** Ensure the safety of all children.
- **Guideline 2.4.** Promote children's healthy nourishment

Guideline 2.1. Support the physical health and well-being of all children.

-  **Develop and implement policies and procedures that promote and protect the physical health and well-being of children, families, and staff.** This may include collaborating with families and specialized service providers to develop and implement individualized plans for children with chronic conditions or special health care needs, such as food allergies or sensitivities, asthma, epilepsy, or diabetes. Staff members understand and accommodate the health-related needs of all children in their care. This includes administering prescription medication, accommodating children's regular health appointments, and being aware of children's special therapy needs (such as physical or occupational therapy). Staff members work with families to implement accommodations and modifications that enable children with special health care needs to participate fully in the setting. See Guideline Area 8 for more information on supporting children with disabilities or developmental delays.
-  **Plan and adjust schedules, environments, and learning experiences to provide children with ample opportunities for physical activity.** Make adaptations as necessary to ensure each child can participate in physical activity. Preschool children need multiple opportunities each day to engage in indoor and outdoor structured (i.e., educator-led) and unstructured (i.e., child-led) physical activity. For example, an educator might plan outdoor time to include both an organized movement activity and plenty of time for children to move and play freely.
-  **Make sure to refer to the appropriate licensing regulations related to supporting the physical health and well-being of children.** For example, ensure required staff members are adequately trained and kept current on pediatric cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid, safety, and health education requirements.



In-Practice Example: Supporting Children's Well-Being Through Intentional Planning

A center-based setting serving preschool-aged children in central California is planning for the upcoming school year. Ms. Marlene and Sra. Rodriguez, the educators of the 4-year-old groups, share that last year they had numerous conversations with families about children's social skills and emotion regulation. Their observations and notes suggest that the children may have been frustrated by overly structured learning experiences and too many transitions throughout the day. With these concerns in mind, the site supervisor and educators adjust the daily schedule, so children have larger blocks of unstructured indoor and outdoor play time.

Recognizing that weather plays a big part in when children can play outdoors, the site supervisor and educators evaluate the outdoor environment and identify a few changes that will enable children to play outdoors regardless of the weather. These changes include moving several play materials under a patio roof and planning potential adjustments to the daily routine for rainy or excessively hot days. In addition, they communicate with families about outdoor play during inclement weather. Ms. Marlene and Sra. Rodriguez share information on the importance of time for outdoor play and the types of backup clothing children might need on hand for those situations. They listen and attend to families' preferences for being outdoors in rainy weather. They also draft a "High Heat Schedule" that moves outdoor play time to earlier in the day when extreme temperatures are forecasted. The site supervisor checks in with families before and after the implementation so they can hear their thoughts and feedback.

Guideline 2.2. Support children's mental health.

-  **Provide a stable, nurturing environment in which children can explore, learn, and develop their social and emotional skills.** A stable and nurturing environment encourages emotionally connected, respectful relationships among children, educators, and other individuals in the setting. Support children in naming, expressing, and regulating their emotions, within the context of each child's development, language, and culture. In addition, provide frequent opportunities for children to engage in unstructured, self-directed play with their peers so they can practice problem-solving and relationship skills. Engaging children in mindfulness-based practices, including movement, breathing, and relaxation, can also support their emotional well-being. See Guideline Area 6 for information about centering relationships to promote children's well-being.
-  **Build trusting relationships and communicate regularly with families to learn about the beliefs and values that influence their interactions and expectations.** The way children and families express and manage emotions is influenced by their culture. Explore with family members children's emotional responses and how family members understand or interpret them.
-  **Partner with families to understand children's temperamental tendencies, communication and interaction preferences, and strengths.** Use information gathered about children as part of establishing predictable and consistent routines, transition strategies, and developmentally appropriate behavioral expectations. See Guideline Area 4 for more information on engaging with families in responsive and collaborative ways and Guideline 7.4 for more information about establishing routines that are predictable but flexible enough to meet children's individual interests and needs.
-  **Acknowledge trauma and adversity as part of children's lived experiences and address trauma, its impact, and trauma-informed practice in the setting's written materials, such as a handbook for families.** Educators apply a trauma-informed approach with children by listening, observing children's behavior, developing and maintaining safe and secure emotional connections with children, and engaging in **coregulation** to manage children's intense emotions and behaviors (Nicholson et al., 2023). See Guideline 5.3 for more information on supporting understanding of the impact of trauma and implementation of trauma-informed strategies and practices.

- ✿ **Foster a strong and healthy support system around children to promote children's mental health and well-being.** This can include making information on mental health topics and community resources readily accessible to educators and families. Partner with early childhood mental health consultants to enhance educators' knowledge and skills in supporting the well-being of children and families (Mathis et al., 2025; Spielberger et al., 2024). Seek guidance from an early childhood mental health consultant, such as a licensed clinical social worker or psychologist with expertise in young children, to help determine if a child is eligible for services through the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This professional can offer expertise in child development, behavior, and eligibility criteria and can help guide educators and families through the referral and assessment process.

Key Consideration

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) is a relationship-based, preventive support system in which a mental health professional partners with educators and families. The goal of ECMHC is to strengthen adults' abilities to support young children's social and emotional development. In preschool settings, ECMHC promotes positive relationships, helps identify concerns early, and supports inclusive, emotionally responsive environments for children and families. It also helps improve educators' practices and reduces stress and burnout. Leaders can support this work by ensuring consistent access to consultation, protecting time for reflective collaboration, and integrating consultation into the setting's practices (Clayback et al., 2025; Silver et al., 2022). For more information about infant and early childhood mental health consultation resources and services, see the [Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Network](#).

Guideline 2.3. Ensure the safety of all children.

-  **Establish a comprehensive safety plan that protects children, families, and staff.** A comprehensive safety plan includes daily safety practices, emergency preparedness and response information, evacuation procedures, and drill and training plans. As part of the safety plan, consider health and safety concerns currently impacting the community. Identify and address potential barriers to implementation. Anticipate, investigate, and resolve hazards in the preschool setting. To maintain current emergency contact information for families and staff, schedule “paperwork update days” a few times a year. Make sure to refer to the appropriate licensing regulations. For example, ensure everyone in the setting is adequately trained in the requirements for mandated reporting, emergency planning, and documentation.
-  **Create and implement a written policy for reporting child abuse and neglect in compliance with local and state laws.** As part of implementing the policy, share information on ongoing trainings to assist all staff in preventing and recognizing signs of child abuse and neglect. In addition, promote a shared understanding so that all staff members understand and can act on their responsibilities as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.
-  **Model safe behavior and teach children about safety in indoor and outdoor environments.** For example, an educator who notices a fallen branch in the outdoor play area might move the branch to a safe area and engage children in a conversation about outdoor hazards.

-  **Set up the physical environment so educators can actively supervise and be accessible to all children.** This may include rearranging furnishings to eliminate areas that are not easily observed. Respond promptly to accidents involving children, including informing appropriate family members, reporting injuries to regulatory agencies as required, and documenting incidents as appropriate. See Guideline 7.2 for information on organizing and preparing the environment.
-  **Collaborate with families and staff on the development and review of emergency plans.** Regularly review emergency plans with families and staff, including first aid and CPR training, to ensure they are current and effective. Implement emergency plans and assign roles with families and staff to ensure everyone is prepared to respond. Maintain documentation as required by regulatory agencies and engage in ongoing evaluation of emergency preparedness.
-  **Conduct emergency drills, including fire, earthquake, and active shooter drills.** When conducting emergency drills, calmly address children's fears by explaining in advance that the children and educators will practice how to stay safe in case something scary happens while children are in the setting. Explain the actions children will be asked to take, such as being quiet and still or walking outside. In addition, prepare children for any startling noises or other sensory input, such as flashing lights, that they will experience at the start of the drill. Reading developmentally appropriate books on potentially alarming experiences can also prepare children for what happens during emergencies.

Guideline 2.4. Promote children's healthy nourishment.

-  **Promote family engagement in children's nutrition and healthy eating habits through ongoing collaboration and learning opportunities.** Communicate regularly with families about their child's daily nourishment as part of supporting a balanced diet for every child. Facilitate conversations about healthy food choices and habits alongside conversations about individual family and cultural preferences. In collaboration with families, plan opportunities for children to help prepare simple foods, such as a snack-making activity.
-  **Follow appropriate licensing regulations related to food services and allergies.** These regulations include requirements related to food handling, child nutrition, and training.
-  **Establish policies and practices to support children with food allergies, including emergency plans.** Ensure all staff members are aware of all child food allergies, including by prominently displaying allergy information wherever children are served food. Also ensure that all staff members receive training in managing food allergies. Training should include identifying and treating severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) as well as following up with families, medical providers, and licensing agencies.

- ✿ **Consider family-style dining or having children and educators sit together during mealtimes if they bring their own food.** Family-style dining—where children serve themselves out of serving dishes—is considered best practice, as it gives children opportunities to learn about healthy eating, including portion sizes for different food groups.



- ✿ **Follow principles of healthy food choices and habits in settings that provide meals for children.** This includes offering a healthy selection of fresh foods and introducing new foods while offering a variety of familiar foods.
- ✿ **Collaborate with families and staff to develop specialized plans for each child's dietary requirements when the setting offers meals and snacks.** This includes children with identified nutritional needs, children with disabilities or developmental delays, and children who have special diets due to family, tribal, or religious preferences, such as kosher or halal meals. Implement these plans to make sure all children's requirements are met.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS Community Care Licensing Regulations,
<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-regulations/legislation-and-regulations/community-care-licensing-regulations>
- » CDSS Legislation and Regulations,
<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/legislation-and-regulations>
- » Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>
- » Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Network,
<https://iecmhcnetwork.org>
- » Office of Administrative Law California Code of Regulations, <https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Index?transitionType=Default&contextData=%28sc.Default%29>
- » Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences Connection Resources Center,
<https://pacesconnection.libguides.com/resourcecenter>
- » Safe Spaces: Foundation for Trauma-Informed Practice for Educational Care Settings,
<https://osg.ca.gov/safespaces/>
- » Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,
<https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/section-504>

Guideline Area 3: Supporting Staff Well-Being and Professional Learning

Fostering well-being and professional learning for oneself and other educators is essential for maintaining a high-quality learning environment. Creating a preschool setting where all staff feel valued, supported, and empowered equips educators to provide high-quality care and learning for children and build strong partnerships with families (Cumming, 2017; Jennings et al., 2020; Narea et al., 2022).

In settings with multiple staff, a supportive and collaborative working environment plays an important role in staff satisfaction and effectiveness. In a supportive and collaborative environment, leaders engage in timely and transparent communication and facilitate shared decision-making (Jeon & Wells, 2018; Sandstrom et al., 2022). Laying the groundwork for high-quality, effective practice begins on an individual's first day in the setting. For example, in settings with more than one staff member, establishing a positive working climate starts with thoughtful planning around hiring and onboarding processes.

Prioritizing staff wellness and mental health not only benefits individuals working in the preschool setting, but also helps establish a stable and nurturing environment for children and families (Buettner et al., 2016; Whitaker et al., 2015). Leaders demonstrate a commitment to everyone's physical and emotional health by collaborating with individuals working in the preschool setting to create and regularly update wellness policies. A comprehensive approach to wellness includes providing sick leave, regular breaks, accessible mental health resources, and a safe physical environment, with practices tailored to actively support stress reduction and workplace well-being. Establishing systems for routine check-ins among leaders and staff to support staff well-being and mental health, along with access to community resources, reinforces a culture of care, social connection, and safety.

Professional growth and development are central to continuous quality improvement and educator satisfaction. Leaders identify for themselves and encourage educators in their settings to identify individual professional learning goals and to participate in formal and informal development opportunities, including **coaching** and **mentoring**. They ensure adequate time, resources, and support for these activities to reinforce high standards for teaching and learning. They also emphasize regular collaboration among educators, families, and others so that professional development remains responsive to the children, the community, and the field.

Key Consideration

Reflective Practice and Reflective Supervision

Reflective practice is the ongoing process in which educators—individually and with others—thoughtfully look back on their practices and children’s learning to evaluate their work, gain new insights, and continuously improve their interactions and teaching. In settings with more than one educator, leaders can also engage in **reflective supervision**. This process begins with the educator engaging in **self-reflection** on their own observations, challenges, and perceptions while the supervisor actively listens and reflects on the educator’s position. The supervisor and educator then co-construct strategies that enhance the educator’s practice and professional confidence. When supervisors are consistently present, attuned to emotions, and responsive to educators’ strengths and needs with curiosity, compassion, and warmth, educators are more likely to experience greater well-being. In turn, they are more likely to relate to families with the same care and responsiveness (Huffhines et al., 2023).

A commitment to reflective practice and ongoing learning is an essential component of high-quality early learning settings. Building routines for reflective supervision, individual and group reflection, and peer feedback establishes a culture in which educators continuously learn from their experiences and each other. Leaders who engage in self-awareness, mindfulness, and open communication and actively promote those practices among educators in their setting help create safe and supportive environments in which educators' well-being and mental health are prioritized, ultimately enhancing outcomes for educators, young children, and families (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2015). Overall, educators benefit from opportunities to discuss challenges, share strategies, and receive both mentoring and coaching tailored to their skills and needs (Maier et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2017). Educators in small family child care home (FCCH) settings working by themselves can find these opportunities by participating in educator networks.

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 3 is provided below.

Guideline Area 3

Supporting Staff Well-Being and Professional Learning

- **Guideline 3.1.** Create and maintain an optimal working environment to attract and retain well-qualified staff.
- **Guideline 3.2.** Develop and implement policies and practices that support staff well-being and mental health.
- **Guideline 3.3.** Support ongoing reflective practice, coaching, and mentoring.
- **Guideline 3.4.** Develop and implement a comprehensive, ongoing plan for professional development.

Guideline 3.1. Create and maintain an optimal working environment to attract and retain well-qualified staff.

-  **Foster a collaborative and fair workplace to support morale and a sense of community.** Develop clear roles and responsibilities across staff and identify where roles overlap and are flexible. High-quality settings engage in clear and transparent communication as well as participatory management where staff input is recognized and considered. Fairness in policies creates a workplace climate that promotes job satisfaction and professional wellness. Support positive relationships among staff to foster a positive, collaborative work environment.
-  **Create hiring and onboarding policies that align with the setting's general philosophy and context.** As part of hiring policies, ensure that job descriptions convey information about the setting's philosophy, environment, and needs. Consider the community served by the setting, including the diverse linguistic and cultural experiences of the children and families. For example, prioritize identifying qualified staff who share the home languages of children and families in the community. Develop an onboarding process to inform new staff about policies, procedures, and available supports. This helps everyone contribute effectively.
-  **Arrange for an appropriate amount of time and support for oneself and other educators to participate in trainings, classes, and conferences.** Encourage and support educators to pursue educational and professional certification.
-  **Engage all staff members in setting annual goals for continuous improvement as part of shared decision-making.** Ensure that staff members receive the resources and support they need to meet annual goals. Invite staff, colleagues, family members, resource and referral agency coaches, technical assistance providers, and others to contribute to continuous planning.

Guideline 3.2. Develop and implement policies and practices that support staff well-being and mental health.

-  **Adopt practices designed to support a workplace culture of wellness.** All preschool settings can establish practices supporting mental health and well-being, whether a family child care home with one educator/owner or a school-based setting with multiple educators. Please see “Elements of Comprehensive Wellness Programs” below for a list of considerations for a comprehensive wellness plan. Periodically check in with oneself, and other staff members as applicable, to evaluate and update wellness policies and practices to maintain an effective program.
-  **Establish practices that support accessing and utilizing community-based mental health resources to support mental health and well-being, including managing stress.** An FCCH with one educator who is also the owner might partner with other FCCH owners to seek out community-based resources. A leader for a center-based preschool setting could collaborate with staff to develop and implement wellness and mental health supports.
-  **Implement wellness practices and policies that support the physical health and safety of all staff members.** This includes ensuring that the physical environment helps keep adults safe from injury during the active work of educating preschool-aged children. Create a structure that allows for regular breaks during the day and time off for illness and vacations. This structure will include building in break times, maintaining a quiet area for breaks, and having coverage or substitute options available when a staff member needs time off.
-  **Establish procedures that staff and families follow if children show signs of illness while in the preschool setting or at home.** Sharing the preschool setting’s sick policy with families helps develop shared expectations among families and staff. Settings may find it helpful to share licensing guidelines with families to support a shared understanding of illness policies.

Key Consideration

Elements of Comprehensive Wellness Programs

Comprehensive wellness programs for preschool settings address all aspects of staff members' mental and physical health, both at work and in their personal lives. Leaders can create a holistic program by combining effective strategies, helpful information, and access to resources that help oneself and staff live balanced, joyful, and fulfilling lives. Key elements include the following:

- arranging for regular breaks and time off for illness and vacations
- designating a separate break area with adult-sized furniture
- arranging for professional learning and access to information on key areas of wellness and self-care (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Support Administration, 2016):
 - emotional well-being
 - environmental well-being
 - financial well-being
 - intellectual well-being
 - occupational well-being
 - physical well-being
 - social well-being
 - spiritual well-being
- planning for substitutes or alternative coverage when needed
- fostering positive, caring relationships within the setting
- creating opportunities for social connection among adults within or outside the setting
- maintaining a list of community resources:
 - disability resources
 - domestic violence resources
 - financial assistance resources
 - food insecurity resources
 - housing insecurity resources
 - mental health resources
 - substance abuse resources

Guideline 3.3. Support ongoing reflective practice, coaching, and mentoring.

-  **Foster a culture of ongoing learning by supporting reflective practice and reflective supervision.** Create opportunities for individual reflection and, either within or outside the setting, for group reflection. Educators benefit from opportunities to meet individually with their supervisors or colleagues in a wider educator network to reflect on and plan for children's learning experiences. They also benefit from time reserved during group meetings for shared reflection on practice. Group meetings can further support professional growth by enabling educators to take turns providing and receiving reflective feedback, with these sessions adapted to meet varying levels of experience among educators. When there is a group of educators in the setting, this might look like making time within weekly schedules for regular review, reflection, and collaborative inquiry to support a culture of continuous learning and improvement. For an FCCH, this could be achieved by taking part in an online practitioners' group.
-  **Engage in self-reflection and encourage others to reflect on their emotional responses, interactions, attitudes, and behaviors with children.** Self-reflection and reflecting together with other educators in the setting or a wider network can encourage mindful awareness of biases and assumptions. Use multiple strategies to promote self-awareness and reflection about practice, such as viewing video or listening to audio recordings, observing peers, and visiting other similar early learning and care settings.
-  **Arrange for regular mentoring opportunities both within and outside the setting, with coaching and mentorship tailored to individual professional development needs.** For example, an educator in an agency might engage with the agency's network of coaches. A longtime FCCH educator might establish a process for mentoring a new assistant they have hired, such as setting aside time to meet weekly and suggesting topics for the assistant to reflect on throughout the coming week.



In-Practice Example: Building a Strong Professional Community as a Family Child Care Provider

Annette, the owner of a family child care home serving four preschool-aged children, understands how vital ongoing professional growth and reflective practices are to maintaining high-quality early learning and care. However, as operator of a small FCCH, she also knows that she needs to leverage community resources for support. She has learned about **trauma-informed practice** by completing an online module in California Early Childhood Online (CECO), but she would like additional support. Guadalupe, a friend who also runs an FCCH, shares information on training and technical assistance coaching offered by the local resource and referral (R&R) agency for their county to implement trauma-informed practices. Later that evening, Annette goes to the R&R website and reaches out via email to register for their program.

Before long, Annette is paired with a coach who visits her home each month to observe her interactions with the children, facilitate self-reflection, and identify areas for growth in her setting, focusing on integrating trauma-informed practices. Once the training and technical assistance program ends, Annette joins an online community of practice for family child care providers. In this forum, members ask questions, share teaching challenges, and offer strategies related to trauma-informed practice. After a few months, Annette feels she has established a strong network to support her ongoing learning and reflective practice, especially as it relates to supporting children who have experienced trauma.

Guideline 3.4. Develop and implement a comprehensive, ongoing plan for professional development.

-  **Collaborate with educators either within or outside the setting to make a professional development plan that supports each individual.** Plans address gaps in knowledge, promote reflective practice, and include regular opportunities for coaching and mentoring. The professional development can take place within the early learning and care setting and through connections in the community. Incorporate ongoing evaluation and revision of the professional development plans, using input from educators—either within the setting or in a wider network—and data from needs assessments.
-  **Arrange for access to a wide range of learning opportunities, such as peer learning, workshops, classes, or conferences.** Educators might engage in peer observations as part of reflective practice. For example, two preschool educators in a center-based setting may observe each other's groups and then come together to reflect on their observations to inform changes to the environment or planned learning experiences. The owner of an FCCH might join a community of practice through their local R&R agency. Educators might also engage in discussion groups or book study groups made up of educators, either within a setting or in a wider network.
-  **Arrange for access to current early childhood education resources from professional associations.** Examples of national organizations include the [**National Association for the Education of Young Children**](#) (NAEYC) and the [**National Association for Family Child Care**](#) (NAFCC). Many organizations also exist at the state level, such as the [**California Association for the Education of Young Children**](#) (CAAEYC) and the [**California Family Child Care Network**](#) (CFCCN).



- ✿ **Arrange for diverse and responsive approaches to professional development that are accessible to every educator who works with children within a setting.** Online professional development opportunities, in the form of asynchronous, self-guided modules, are available at [CECO](https://www.ceco.org). This enables educators to participate in ways that work with their schedule. Seek training in the languages that educators in a setting understand best, and when needed, partner with outside coaches or mentors who share educators' languages to provide linguistically inclusive approaches. Inviting outside coaches or facilitators can also help strengthen one's own and other educators' authentic and reflective communication skills. Strive to identify professional development opportunities that make work meaningful, challenging, and engaging.

 **Develop a comprehensive approach to learning about culturally responsive and affirming practice.** As part of this approach, explore one's own cultural perspective and the perspectives of others in the setting while appreciating the experiences and strengths of colleagues, children, families, and communities. In addition, reflect independently or with others on how individual perspectives influence relationships and educational practices. Participate in professional development and conversations that promote culturally responsive and affirming practice. Seek mentoring and learning opportunities for oneself and other educators to deepen awareness of community values and to deepen the partnership between staff, families, and communities. See Guideline 5.1 for more information on promoting culturally and linguistically affirming policies and practices.

 **Design a professional learning approach that is coherent equity focused, and embedded in daily practices.** Key areas of professional learning include the following (NAEYC, 2025b):

- engaging in developmentally appropriate practice across all domains of learning and development
- strengthening emotionally supportive and instructionally rich interactions, learning experiences, and environments
- supporting children's social and emotional development and mental health through relationship-based, trauma-informed practices
- advancing culturally affirming and anti-bias practices that are responsive to children's and families' identities and lived experiences
- supporting multilingual learners, including supporting development in their home languages, and understanding the trajectories of multilingual development and best practices to support children's engagement in learning experiences
- supporting children with disabilities or developmental delays through inclusive, responsive approaches, including Universal Design for Learning
- deepening reciprocal, relationship-based family engagement that respects and supports families as the most important influence in children's early learning and development

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS California Early Childhood Online (CECO),
<https://www.caearlychildhoodonline.org/>
- » California Association for the Education of Young Children,
<https://caeyc.org/>
- » California Child Care Resource and Referral (R&R) Network,
<https://rrnetwork.org/>
- » California Family Child Care Network, <https://cfccn.net/>
- » Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Reflective Practices and Supervision,
<https://www.iecmhc.org/tutorials/competence/mod4-20/>
- » Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Network,
<https://iecmhcnetwork.org>
- » National Association for Family Child Care, <https://nafcc.org/>
- » National Association for the Education of Young Children,
<https://www.naeyc.org/>

Page left intentionally blank

Building Relationship- Centered Partnerships With Families and Children



Guideline Area 4: Engaging With Families in Responsive and Collaborative Ways

As children's first educators, families bring important expertise about their child and family and lived experiences that are valuable in supporting children's learning and development. Family partnerships are key to children's early childhood education and have a positive impact on family's confidence and engagement at home, which in turn supports developmental and educational child outcomes (Lang et al., 2020; Lang et al., 2024). For example, partnering with families promotes children's academic and social-emotional skills (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016; Premo et al., 2023). Children who are learning an additional language in the preschool setting especially benefit from family engagement practices, such as two-way communication and collaboration, meaningful opportunities for involvement, and access to translations and interpreters during meetings and family social events (Premo et al., 2023). To learn more about family engagement practices, see the [**What and Why of Family Engagement**](#) resource. Educators and families can individualize strengths, needs, and supports to build a system of learning and support across the home and preschool settings for children with disabilities and developmental delays (Gaspar & Sahay, 2025). Family partnerships are important for all children and should be grounded in trusting relationships between educators and families in which both the educators and the families work together to support a child's development, learning, and well-being. Creating a welcoming environment for all families and engaging in meaningful, two-way communication lay the foundation for trusting relationships between families and the leaders, other educators, and staff in the preschool setting. Strong family partnerships develop when families feel respected, seen, heard, and understood (Office of Head Start, 2021).

A list of guidelines included in Area 4 is provided below.

Guideline Area 4

Engaging With Families in Responsive and Collaborative Ways

- **Guideline 4.1.** Create a welcoming environment that promotes a sense of belonging.
- **Guideline 4.2.** Engage in meaningful two-way communication with families.
- **Guideline 4.3.** Collaborate with families as partners in supporting children's learning and transitions to early elementary school.
- **Guideline 4.4.** Support and advocate for families and leverage community resources.



Guideline 4.1. Create a welcoming environment that promotes a sense of belonging.

-  **Create a welcoming preschool setting where families feel valued and know their voices matter.** Make the environment friendly, encourage ongoing two-way communication, involve families in building the preschool setting community, and honor families' cultures, languages, and lived experiences.
-  **Listen to families with openness and inquiry and learn from them starting at enrollment.** Offer support to assist families through the enrollment process, including support for paperwork completion, which may include accessing support in their home language. Invite families to share their hopes for their child's future; their child's interests, needs, and strengths; and their goals for their child's development through conversations. Ongoing conversations with families help deepen understanding of the family's aspirations, as well as their values and beliefs regarding their child's development. Additionally, gather information about any concerns families might have about the child's development. Take notes and create a short summary to keep for ongoing planning and periodic follow-up with families.
-  **Provide an entryway that is comfortable and inviting.** This may include a cozy seating area for family members or a welcome wall with updates and the program's values or photos and art of the children and families. A setting can invite families to share photos that can be posted in the entryway of the preschool setting. These practices show consideration for how the family and child may feel entering the early learning and care setting for the first time and every day.
-  **Express a warm welcome by taking the time to greet families and children.** Take time to acknowledge that the child has arrived and try to connect with their family member. For example, when a preschooler arrives, smile and say, "Good morning, Maya! We're happy you're here." Greet their parent or caregiver and ask how the child slept and what they ate that morning to make both the child and their family feel welcome and noticed. In the same way, offer a warm send-off to the child and family when the child leaves for the day.

-  **Designate areas where children and their families see themselves represented in the preschool setting.** This might include a designated wall with photos of families at home and in the community, posted greetings in the home language of the children, and family portraits created by children and families. Families can share culturally meaningful artifacts from home, like empty food containers to include in a play kitchen area.
-  **Invite families to spend time in the preschool setting, participate in activities, and share their culture and family experiences.** Inviting families into the setting will look different depending on the setting and depending on regulations and policies. For example, families might join group time for their child's birthday to share a family story about their child, read a book to a group of children, or teach a song in their home language. Encourage families to share their traditions, music, languages, foods, stories, or celebrations. This helps children learn about and respect different backgrounds, making everyone feel included and valued.
-  **Foster connection among all families through events, such as educational family nights and celebrations.** For example, an educator might create opportunities for families to work on learning activities together. And another idea may be to offer optional opportunities for families who share a home language or cultural background to connect through group gatherings or in parent meetings.
-  **Provide translations and use interpreters when needed and available to help all families feel welcome in the preschool setting.** Translation technology tools can also be helpful. When possible, hire educators who can communicate in the families' home languages.

Guideline 4.2. Engage in meaningful two-way communication with families.

 **Build meaningful two-way communication with families.** Regularly engage in reciprocal exchanges of positive information about the child, showing genuine interest in their child and respecting their perspectives in order to work together in supporting the child's development and learning. Encourage families to express their needs and concerns and listen attentively and with empathy. To learn more about building meaningful two-way communication with families, see [Building Partnerships With Families](#).

 **Use various ways to communicate with families, like checking in at pick-up or drop-off and using apps or messaging services to share key information.** Early on, ask families what their preferred mode of communication is. Some families may prefer communicating via an app or texting, others may prefer a phone call or email, and still others may prefer to touch base at drop-off or pick-up. Consider setting up a bulletin board or newsletter for general updates, such as upcoming events, early learning and care themes, and reminders. It's important to be mindful of families' privacy and always share sensitive or confidential information in private conversations or secure channels. This ensures that one keeps families informed while respecting their confidentiality and comfort.



-  **Ensure that all communication is accessible, comprehensible, and in the family's preferred language.** Provide families with examples of how to share feedback, raise concerns, ask questions, and request a meeting with their child's educator. Share clear communication hours so families know when to expect a response. For example, share with families that messages sent outside of hours will be answered the next business day. Provide families of multilingual learners with reliable ways to communicate with educators, like an interpreter when available or use of translation technology tools. Be sure that families understand how to request language support.
-  **Use a communication approach that is responsive to each family's unique circumstance and honors their interest in supporting the child's learning and development.** For example, offer flexible meeting times or virtual check-ins for families whose work schedules do not align with that of the preschool setting or who have limited transportation, making it easier for them to stay informed and engaged. This approach respects each family's circumstances and helps ensure all families can participate.
-  **Communicate regularly with families about children's well-being, learning, and development.** Daily communication with families ensures that educators and families can share important information, observations, and insights that help address the child's individual needs and strengths. This collaboration helps create consistency between home and the early learning and care setting, strengthens the child's sense of security, and allows for early intervention or support. Remember to build from children's strengths when communicating with the family, for example, telling them about a moment when their child was positively engaged in an activity. Starting with the positive helps to build trust with the family.
-  **Use strategies for effective in-the-moment communication with families to show that educators respect and value families' perspectives.** For example, engage in attentive listening, summarize what families say, ask clarifying questions, and pose open-ended questions. Effective communication is important because it helps prevent misunderstandings, creates clarity, and builds trust, which in turn leads to stronger family–educator partnerships to support children's learning and development.



In-Practice Example: Highlighting Everyday Learning

During a conference with a parent, Mrs. Ana shares a story with the Park family about their child, Dustin. She tells them, “I’ve noticed how quickly Dustin is showing initiative in helping others. Dustin has mentioned how he helps make breakfast at home. I’ve even heard him playing and saying, ‘One egg for me and two for Mrs. Ana.’” Dustin’s grandma replies, “That’s Dustin! He loves helping! He even sets the table for him and his cousins.” Mrs. Ana says, “He is always the first to want to help. What are some other ways Dustin helps at home?” The grandma mentions how Dustin helps his younger cousins build towers and play with puzzles. The grandma begins to wonder about other activities he seems willing and ready to help with. Mrs. Ana thanks his grandma for sharing such insightful details and stories about Dustin. She suggests helping with cleanup, as she has noticed Dustin expressing interest when she sweeps after mealtime. Mrs. Ana adds, “Those sorts of things you do at home, like making breakfast or doing laundry together, help Dustin develop important skills, like sorting, counting, and learning new words. Every time you involve him, he’s learning, connecting, and building confidence. Your everyday moments mean so much for his development.” A few days after the conference, Mrs. Ana sends a photo of Dustin helping set the table to his family on a communication app.

Guideline 4.3. Collaborate with families as partners in supporting children's learning and transitions to early elementary school.

-  **Engage in ongoing conversations with each family about their child's learning experiences and educational goals and progress.** Collaborate with families to set goals for children that take into account each child's strengths, needs, and developmental skills. See the guidelines in the Supporting Children's Learning and Development section for additional information.
-  **Co-create solutions with family members to support children's strengths and needs.** Create a welcoming, safe, private space for families and the educator or educators to communicate with one another. Educators and families might meet to discuss a child's needs, sharing both strengths and concerns (like progress and areas for growth) and exchanging observations and ideas. Together, identify and try specific strategies or supports, such as adjusting routines, activities, or communication methods, to help the child succeed.
-  **Encourage families to see the value of their routines at home and how interactions during these routines are important for their child's development and how they connect to the learning experiences in the preschool setting.** Support families by helping them recognize how children learn and develop through everyday moments at home. Educators can point out how daily activities like cooking, getting ready for the day, and playing help children grow and learn new skills. For example, cooking together provides an opportunity for a child to learn about measurement, gain a sense of accomplishment through their contributions, and understand why a particular recipe is special to their family.

- ✿ **Consider ways to invite families into the early care and learning setting to support children in their learning and development.** For example, invite families to join a “Math Around the Room” scavenger hunt. Together with their children, families can look for objects that match certain shapes. Encourage families to lead a music or movement session by teaching a song or dance from their culture and in their home language or to share a favorite story with the group. Offer in-person and virtual opportunities for families to participate, honoring families’ preferences and acknowledging that preschool settings have different regulations and policies they must follow.
- ✿ **Engage in ongoing two-way communication with each family about how their child is adapting and interacting within the group and early care and learning setting.** For example, discuss with families how the child forms friendships, works with others, manages transitions, manages challenging situations such as peer conflicts, and completes tasks on their own. These discussions are helpful as children transition into the preschool setting and can also help families prepare for the move to early elementary school.



 Cultivate enthusiasm and find creative ways to engage families at preschool entry or in the transition to a new preschool setting or to early elementary school.

When families and children approach change with excitement and confidence, it can ease anxieties and set the stage for a successful start in the new environment. For example, invite families to join their children in making a special portfolio or book titled “All About Me and My Family,” which can be shared in their new setting. This activity would not only help children celebrate their identities and family stories but would also help new educators and staff to learn more about them. For more information, see [California's Great Start Transition to Elementary School Toolkit](#).

 Work together with families so every child and their family are prepared and confident as they transition to early elementary school. Share information to support their child’s transition. For example, discuss best practices for easing children’s anxieties about big transitions and learn about developmentally appropriate transitional activities, such as suggesting families visit the new school setting or engage in stories or role-play about starting early elementary school. As part of transition planning, for children who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), encourage families to participate in IEP transition meetings. See Guideline 8.2 for information on how to work closely in partnership with families to support children with disabilities through transitions.

Key Consideration

Transitions to Early Elementary School

Preschool transitions are significant experiences for young children because they often involve changes in caregivers, peers, routines, and expectations. Children may move among multiple early learning settings before entering kindergarten, and each transition requires them to adjust to new environments while continuing to build relationships and a sense of belonging. Thoughtful transition practices, such as sharing information across settings, maintaining predictable routines, and partnering with families, help children feel secure and supported during times of change. When transitions are planned with care and coordination, children are better able to engage in learning and build confidence as they move into new settings.

Guideline 4.4. Support and advocate for families and leverage community resources.

-  **Connect families to valuable community and program resources based on your understanding of families' strengths and needs.** Collaborate with educators, families, social service providers, and community partners to build shared knowledge and strengthen family advocacy. Use regular two-way communication, at pick-up and drop-off and during conferences or home visits, and family learning opportunities to share and connect families with resources. Some examples of resources that can be shared include child development supports like screenings or early intervention supports, health and mental health resources, financial supports, and family empowerment/engagement centers in the community.
-  **Help families navigate support systems, such as health care, mental health services, or early intervention.** For example, families may ask for contact information, have questions about enrolling in resources, or inquire about referrals to specialized resources. Preschool staff can engage in conversations with families about referrals to community resources and assist in identifying or gaining access to services as needed. For example, during a family conference, a family discloses information that prompts an educator to share available local health care services with the family. In addition, the educator connects the family to interpreter support and translated materials to reduce language barriers and assist in access to services. This approach fosters trust, breaks down barriers to essential services, and strengthens family well-being, which positively impacts children's development and success in the preschool program.
-  **Anticipate families' needs for support based on knowledge of the families' circumstances or of current events that may affect them (e.g., economic climate, natural disasters, public health epidemics, etc.).** Provide resources and information related to the family's needs, and if families decide to follow up, support them in the process.
-  **Identify signs that children or families may require support outside the program, maintain timely documentation, and initiate further inquiry, collaborating with families as appropriate.** Work with staff and others to respond to signs of risk or stress in children. Protect the confidentiality and privacy of families. For information about ensuring the safety of all children in the preschool setting, see Guideline 2.3.

-  **Maintain a directory of local resources and services for families.** For example, provide them with information about early intervention programs, food assistance programs, and employment support. Maintain relationships with local organizations, such as local child care resource and referral (R&R) agencies or county offices of education, to stay up to date on the best way to distribute information about their resources and services.
-  **Consider multiple ways to ensure that all families have information on resources that may help them and their children.** For example, share information about resources and services in a newsletter or an app or have informational flyers on a board that families frequently check during drop-offs. Invite community experts to share resources and services with families. Provide opportunities for families who have direct experience with resources and services to share and recommend resources and services with other families. Consider creating an anonymous suggestion box where families can share recommendations and experiences without revealing their family details or identities.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDE California's Great Start Transition to Elementary School Toolkit, <https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/resources/120438/californias-great-start-transition-to-elementary-school-toolkit>
- » CDE Family Engagement Toolkit: Continuous Improvement Through an Equity Lens, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/documents/family-engagement.pdf>
- » Head Start Family Engagement: Building Partnerships With Families – A Four-Module Series, <https://headstart.gov/family-engagement/article/building-partnerships-families-course>
- » Head Start Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices, <https://headstart.gov/publication/strategies-family-engagement-attitudes-practices>
- » Quality Counts California Module 1: The What, Why, and How of Family Engagement, <https://qualitycountscalifornia.net/early-educators/family-engagement/family-engagement-toolkit/module-1-the-what-why-and-how-of-family-engagement/>

Guideline Area 5: Affirming the Cultures and Lived Experiences of Children and Families

To support children’s learning and development in the preschool setting, it is important to get to know each child, who they are becoming, and how they express themselves, interact with others, and learn. The cultural practices, beliefs, and values—or, more generally, the **culture**—of each child’s home and family, as well as the cultures of their community and the environments in which they grow up, shape their development (Velez-Agosto et al., 2017). In addition to the influence of culture, children’s developing identities are influenced by their race, their ethnicity, the languages they use to communicate and learn, and their individual strengths, ways of learning, and needs. Families’ lived experiences, such as their immigration experiences, their socioeconomic status, health care access and quality, and other factors (for example, whether they are providing foster care to children or have adopted children) also affect children’s development. Recognizing and embracing every child in the preschool setting for who they are means affirming and supporting the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all families and children. In turn, this promotes equitable learning opportunities for all children within the preschool setting. When children’s culture and lived experiences are not only reflected but also supported and incorporated into the physical environment, routines, and learning experiences, children feel a sense of pride in who they are and a sense of belonging in the setting (REL Pacific, n.d.). In addition to having “mirrors” of themselves, children also gain “windows” into understanding each other better in order to show care for each other in an equitable learning environment (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020).

Children’s diverse lived experiences may include experiences of early adversity and **trauma**. Sources of trauma in a young child’s life may include abuse and neglect, domestic violence, food or housing insecurity, natural disasters, immigration, racism, ableism, family separations, death or illness of a family member, and medical trauma. In addition to direct experiences of trauma, the child’s family or community may have experiences of historical trauma such as separation from homes, families, forced migration, and violent colonization. Historical trauma may impact children’s and families’ sense of emotional security with educators, be harmful to their mental health, and lead to a lack of trust or willingness to interact with early childhood systems (Administration for Children & Families, n.d.). Children’s experiences of adversity and trauma can have an impact on their learning and development, in particular, on their social and emotional development. As a response to trauma, children may show signs of traumatic stress reactions in their behavior, such as how they relate to people, play, eat, or manage transitions and routines, as well as how they express and regulate their emotions (Bartlett, 2021; Kurtz, 2023; Zero to Six Collaborative Group, 2010). To be responsive to children who may have experienced trauma, educators need to develop an understanding of the impact of trauma and how to implement trauma-informed strategies and practices. The recommendations in this guideline area address key practices for affirming the cultures and lived experiences of children and families.

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 5 is provided below.

Guideline Area 5

Affirming the Cultures and Lived Experiences of Children and Families

- **Guideline 5.1.** Promote culturally and linguistically affirming policies and practices.
- **Guideline 5.2.** Promote equity and inclusion in practices and interactions among children.
- **Guideline 5.3.** Support understanding of the impact of trauma and implementation of trauma-informed strategies and practices.

Guideline 5.1. Promote culturally and linguistically affirming policies and practices.

-  **Create policies and practices that recognize and embrace children’s home cultures and languages as assets and strengths and that connect with the cultural wealth of children’s families and communities.** For example, as guidance around dress codes for staff in settings with more than one staff member is developed and implemented, it should reflect intentionality and be responsive to the culture of families, educators, and other staff. Also, guidance should address when and how to celebrate holidays as a preschool community. As part of the planning, children, families, and staff can share ways that they celebrate a particular holiday. For example, they can create specific decorative items, wear specific clothing, prepare specific foods, or engage in specific activities. For more information on partnering with families to honor their culture and family experiences, see Guideline 4.1.

-  **Establish a comprehensive approach to explore one’s own cultural perspective and the perspectives of other educators and staff in the setting.** Seek opportunities for oneself and other educators in the setting to develop awareness of cultural backgrounds, gain insight into how culture influences their teaching, and appreciate the unique perspectives and strengths of children, families, and communities. Arrange for regular professional development, in the setting or in a wider network, focused on culturally responsive and affirming practices. This improves the ability to uplift and incorporate children’s and families’ cultural, linguistic, ethnic, ability, and individual diversity in the learning environment. It also enables educators to appreciate the experiences and strengths of colleagues within the setting, their community, and the children and families they serve.

✿ Arrange for opportunities for oneself and other educators in the setting to reflect on how personal cultural perspectives and experiences influence relationships with children and families. Discuss with other educators in settings with more than one staff member or in a network (such as a community of practice) the ways in which teaching and care practices are influenced by experiences and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, arrange for mentoring to help oneself and other educators in the setting gain a deeper understanding of their own values and beliefs and those of the children’s families and communities and how to address differences in values between those held by the preschool setting and those held by families.

✿ Incorporate the cultures of the children and families into the learning environment as part of the ongoing, daily learning experiences. Promote the use of materials and activities as part of the regular curriculum that authentically reflect the cultures, languages, ethnicities, and individual lived experiences of children and their families in the preschool setting rather than only celebrating a singular day or doing one specific cultural activity (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). This includes art, textiles, or musical instruments that may be meaningful to families and their cultures. Select music from a variety of cultures that could be played during less structured time. This reflection of children’s backgrounds and experiences is also important as educators plan for and implement children’s daily routines for feeding, toileting, and napping. For example, support the variety of ways that children eat at mealtimes based on their families’ cultural practices and preferences, such as with utensils or with their hands, and include the foods they prefer to eat, whether the setting or the families provide the meals and snacks.



 Incorporate into learning experiences all of the linguistic resources that children use.

For example, put up labels in the learning environment in children’s home languages, share songs or chants that are meaningful to children during routines, and provide books in multiple languages or multilingual books (like a bilingual English and Spanish book). Support the child’s use of **translanguaging**, in which the child uses all the languages they know to best understand, communicate, and express themselves. See Guideline Area 9 for additional information about supporting children who are learning more than one language. Support and be responsive to children’s communication using their home **language varieties**, such as African American English. Refer to the Language and Literacy Development domain in the *California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations* (PTKLF) for more information on ways to support children’s use of their home languages and language varieties.

 Assess how children’s cultural backgrounds and lived experiences are represented in materials in the setting, such as with books, play materials, toys, and photos of the children and families.

Consider using a checklist or compiling a list of developmentally and culturally appropriate recommendations for materials from reliable websites, organizations, professional networks, colleagues, and children’s families. For example, to bring children’s families and communities into the preschool setting, educators can invite families to contribute photographs that can be posted at children’s eye level or made into “books” that are placed in a reading area. A library of children’s books can also be created, and the local library might be consulted to select books. Leaders and other educators establish ways to study and improve the environment on an ongoing basis to ensure that it reflects the families’ diverse backgrounds.

Key Consideration

Partnering With Families to Affirm Children's Home Culture

Partnering with families is critical to *centering* the culture of the children in the preschool setting, as families carry much of the knowledge of the cultural heritage, values, beliefs, and traditions. When initially building partnerships with families, practices for inviting family participation should be responsive to the families' cultural values and preferred ways of engaging. Practices for engaging and partnering with families make families feel respected and welcome. For some families, this means reaching out to them individually when possible or having opportunities to interact with families informally (Ramirez, 2003; Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care, 2013; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Build relationships with families to establish a strong connection between the home and the preschool setting, beyond a one-time interaction or request. Educators collaborate with families to ensure that the overall learning environment reflects and supports the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children and families in the setting. Invite families to contribute items such as objects or materials that are meaningful to them as well as family photos to post in the setting. Learn about the routines that are meaningful to families, such as mealtimes, ways of spending time together, and how they carry out routines at home. Collaborate with families to design ways of reflecting and integrating the families' cultures and languages in activities that are meaningful to them, such as story time, games during outdoor play, celebrations of children's milestones, or opportunities for families to gather as a preschool community.

Guideline 5.2. Promote equity and inclusion in practices and interactions among children.

-  **Build expectations and norms to promote children’s emotional safety, prevent bias and discrimination, and support children’s role as part of an equitable and inclusive preschool community.** Work with children and families to co-create developmentally and culturally appropriate expectations for valuing one another, treating others with respect, helping and sharing with others, and promoting fairness and recognizing unfairness. For example, having a class bear that children take turns bringing home can help children to practice sharing. Norms or expectations can be posted in the environment and shared with children on a regular basis. For example, educators can reference the norms as part of conversations at mealtime, during circle time, or in informal conversations during outdoor play.
-  **Provide opportunities for children to learn about and practice fairness and respect.** Align these opportunities with the PTKLF Social and Emotional Development domain. For example, an educator can describe what children can do to be a “super friend,” such as looking out for others when they need help or making sure everyone who wants to play can play (see the PTKLF Social and Emotional Development domain). Use persona dolls (dolls with unique names and identities related to race, ethnicity, gender, ability, etc.) to engage children in practicing fairness and respect through role play.



-  **Set up the environment and create learning experiences that promote children's identity development.** Offer materials that reflect variation within and across communities, for example, posters and stories with representations of children with disabilities using a range of assistive technologies. As part of learning experiences, share stories or incorporate persona dolls that affirm children's identities and celebrate children's strengths and assets, such as how they solve problems or communicate, their ways of living and experiencing the world, or their skin or hair color.

-  **Help children learn about similarities and differences among families and communities.** Provide opportunities for children to interact and build relationships with all of the other children. For example, an educator can move materials around the room or encourage games where children mix up the pairings or groupings in which they typically play. Set up the environment so that all children can fully participate in shared activities. Children may ask questions or make comments as they notice differences. For example, a child might share how they ride an adaptive bike at home that is similar to the tricycle their friend rides on the playground. It is important to address questions and comments directly, thus modeling comfort with communicating about identities and differences. Also, build on spontaneous moments to reflect with children. For example, a learning opportunity may come up in a conversation about food or snack preferences or could be demonstrated in stories or role play. For additional ideas, see the [Preschool Through Third Grade Learning Progressions](#), which includes an in-practice example for discussing similarities and differences across people in preschool.

-  **Engage in reflection on one's beliefs and practices and learn from others through educator networks and communities of practice.** For example, a family child care provider may join an educator network organized by their local child care R&R agency. Arrange for professional development activities for oneself and other educators in the setting to learn about anti-bias practices that promote equity and inclusion.



In-Practice Example: Materials to Support Equity and Inclusion

At Ms. Pham's family child care home, she offers messages of equity and inclusion through the materials she provides, her daily practice with children, and her interactions with families. She provides developmentally and culturally appropriate materials and opportunities for children to learn about all the ways that they are similar and different and appreciate the strengths of each child. For example, she creates a photo book showing the families of each child in the group, and she invites children's families to contribute pictures. She shares stories that show many different family structures. She also celebrates children's curiosity and addresses difference when it comes up in conversation, making sure to respond to children's questions. For example, a child asks, "How come Arden doesn't have a mommy?" Ms. Pham responds, pulling out the photo book and turning to Arden's page: "In your family, you have a mama and a papa who take care of you. In my family, I have my two babies that I take care of with my partner, and in Arden's family, she has her papa who takes care of her. We all have different people who we call family. And all the people we call family love and care for us!" She also explains and provides the children with examples of when words might be hurtful, acting out these scenarios in role play.

Guideline 5.3. Support understanding of the impact of trauma and implementation of trauma-informed strategies and practices.

-  **Arrange for professional development addressing trauma and trauma-informed strategies.** Seek professional development that builds understanding of trauma and the impact of trauma on children's learning, development, and behavior; provides developmentally appropriate trauma-informed strategies and practices; and supports educators to consider the impact of trauma when forming expectations and making judgments about children's behavior. A key resource for professional learning is the CECO module on Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Practices.
-  **Support all educators in the setting to be mindful of and sensitive to children's lived experiences of adversity and trauma and create a secure and stable environment for children.** Fostering relationships in which children trust adults, are comfortable expressing their emotions, feel supported in calming or regulating their emotions, and feel that they can seek help from adults when needed is important for all children. Fostering emotionally connected, secure relationships is especially important for children who have experienced trauma. As educators acknowledge that trauma and adversity may be a part of children's lived experiences, the educators may require additional supports. For example, leaders can arrange for each educator in a setting with more than one staff member to have sufficient time to help children develop secure attachments, especially if the child appears to be struggling with trusting adults and perceives adults as a threat.
-  **Create a secure and stable environment for children by establishing a predictable schedule and consistent routines, especially while preparing children for changes or transitions in the day.** Children who have experienced or are experiencing trauma may need additional support transitioning between activities. Additionally, arrange for children's basic needs to be met while they are in the preschool setting, for example, ensure that children are provided with appropriate food. For more information about connecting families to community resources, see Guideline 4.4.

-  **Listen to the challenges families share that may affect children’s social and emotional development, including major transitions, migration, and shifts in home environment and/or caregiver(s).** Through two-way communication with families, learn about and share observations of their child’s behavior, interactions, and play. Within the context of trusting relationships, partner with families to identify specific possible stressors and stress responses and what activates a stress response and to determine the child’s underlying needs. For example, if drop-off is a stressor for the child, work with the family to provide additional time and supports for the child. Create and follow policies and procedures that protect children’s and families’ sensitive information.

-  **Arrange for observation and documentation of children’s behavior, interactions, and play to reflect on children’s well-being and gather additional information about how and when children may be experiencing stress.** See Guideline 10.2 for additional guidance on engaging in ongoing observation to document children’s learning and development.

-  **Collaborate with mental health professionals and other specialists to plan trauma-informed supports and interventions and to identify services and resources for children and their families in partnership with families and specialists.** If needed, connect families to R&R centers, family resource centers, case managers, and other community resources to support children who have experienced trauma and who may be showing signs of stress response and need additional support for regulating emotions and behavior.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS California Early Childhood Online (CECO),
<https://www.caearlychildhoodonline.org/>
- » CDE Preschool Through Third Grade (P–3) Learning Progressions,
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/p3/>
- » CDE Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations,
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>
- » Head Start Trauma-Informed Care Program Systems,
<https://headstart.gov/mental-health/understanding-trauma-healing-adults/trauma-informed-care-program-systems>
- » NAEYC Anti-Bias Resources,
<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/books/anti-bias-education>
- » Zero to Three Trauma-Informed Practices in Early Childhood Education,
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/journal/trauma-informed-practices-in-early-childhood-education/>

Guideline Area 6: Centering Relationships in Early Learning and Care Settings to Promote Children’s Well-Being

Children develop in the context of relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017)—relationships with family, educators, peers, and everyone a child interacts with in their early learning and care setting and community. When supporting children’s development and well-being in the early learning and care setting, relationships must be at the center. Early relational health, defined as “mutual, meaningful, and affirming moments of genuine connection and belonging” provide the essential ingredients for children’s healthy development and for them to thrive (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2025, p. 31). When children have trusting relationships with educators, they feel safe and secure, and they feel more connected with others and can fully engage in the learning environment.

Nurturing relationships support social and emotional learning (SEL), which is foundational for children’s well-being (NASEM, 2025). Important SEL competencies include a strong sense of self, abilities, and goals, social awareness to show empathy, appreciation of similarities and differences, and the ability to practice fairness, as well as skills for developing healthy relationships (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.). At the same time, educators’ social and emotional competence contributes to the quality of interactions with children, relationships between colleagues, and



a more positive emotional climate of the learning environment (Jennings et al., 2017) and supports children’s learning (Brown et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important for high-quality early learning and care settings to implement an SEL approach that promotes social and emotional competencies for all, including children and educators (Durlak et al., 2025).

A key aspect of SEL in early childhood is learning expectations for behavior and managing behavior (Durlak et al., 2025). Nurturing, emotionally connected relationships with children help educators understand how children respond to expectations and manage their behavior. Educators understand children’s behavior as communication and appreciate how the learning environment influences children’s behavior. The recommendations in this guideline area address key practices for centering relationships in early learning and care settings to promote children’s well-being.

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 6 is provided below.

Guideline Area 6

Centering Relationships in Early Learning and Care Settings to Promote Children’s Well-Being

- **Guideline 6.1.** Orient practice around the understanding that children’s development and learning is grounded in relationships.
- **Guideline 6.2.** Ensure that all young children in the setting experience nurturing, emotionally connected relationships.
- **Guideline 6.3.** Adopt a social and emotional learning (SEL) approach that promotes educators’ and children’s social and emotional competence and well-being.
- **Guideline 6.4.** Provide guidance to set developmentally appropriate expectations for children’s behavior and establish behavioral supports.

Guideline 6.1. Orient practice around the understanding that children’s development and learning is grounded in relationships.

Build each educator’s capacity to provide supports for children’s learning and development that acknowledge and connect with the relationships in their life.

Acknowledge children’s family relationships as central to their development and learning. Arrange for professional development on the role of relationships in shaping children’s development, including **attachment relationships** and relationships with caregivers at home and in the learning environment.

Build awareness that all individuals, children and adults alike, seek connection with others and that at the same time each child develops relationships in unique ways depending on their personalities, disabilities, culture, sensory profiles, and communication styles. It is important to learn the strengths and needs of each child, honor each child’s desires to connect and communicate, and value each child’s way of building those relationships. Arrange for professional development on strategies for taking a relationship-based approach to education in which educators build strong relationships with children as the foundation for supporting children’s learning and development.

Develop a family engagement policy that honors all the relationships that contribute to children’s development. Promote communication practices that support relationship building and partnership between families and educators such as regular, two-way communication between families and educators. For example, set up regular touch points where families can share their goals for their children, as well as their children’s strengths, interests, and needs, in addition to regular educator conferences with families. Throughout the year, it is important to be mindful of supporting families’ preferred communication methods and languages. Partner with families to support children’s learning and development through an open-door policy, specific days and activities in which families participate and contribute, and resources for families to support children’s learning at home.

Guideline 6.2. Ensure that all young children in the setting experience nurturing, emotionally connected relationships.

-  **Arrange for consistent and responsive interactions with each child.** Arrange the flow of the day to ensure that strong connections are built with each child through interactions as part of routines and learning experiences. For example, genuinely and warmly greet children at the beginning of each day. Throughout the day, actively listen to children, get down to their level when needed, and consistently respond to their cues and needs, asking children how they are feeling. At the end of the day, remind them of something they accomplished or ask them what they enjoyed about their day. Work on setting clear expectations for children and encouraging behavior that meets expectations, for example, by communicating to a child using feedback that is positive and descriptive and that acknowledges the behavior, such as “Thank you for taking a carpet square for your friend as well.” Collaborate with families to form or understand reasonable expectations for each child.
-  **Take time to understand what children’s interests are and connect with children over the things they enjoy as part of relationship-building.** Getting to know each child’s individual strengths, identities, life experiences, and interests is essential. Offer opportunities for children to share about their interests with others, choose from different activities, and focus on a topic of interest to them during learning experiences. Promote a joyful learning environment by engaging with children in child-led, playful interactions and setting up the environment with opportunities for choice and open-ended experiences. Through playful interactions guided by the child, educators can learn from the child about their feelings and interests to deepen their relationship and share in joy with each child.
-  **Reflect on interactions with each child and identify ways to create opportunities for relationship-building and emotional connection.** Consider how each child may require an individualized approach to develop an emotionally connected relationship based on their interests, lived experiences, and needs. Practice observation and documentation to notice, understand, and be responsive to children’s interests, lived experiences, and needs. For example, observe and document children’s preferences for play or the activities and materials they gravitate toward. Plan to observe all children over time and ensure attention to each child, including those who are quiet or less active.

Guideline 6.3. Adopt a social and emotional learning (SEL) approach that promotes educators' and children's social and emotional competence and well-being.

-  **Create a preschool setting that supports children's social and emotional competencies, regulation of emotions, behavior, stress, healthy peer interactions, and problem-solving.** Consider the role of SEL in promoting equitable learning experiences for all children, for example, by supporting children in showing empathy to others and in developing understanding and respect of similarities and differences.
-  **Develop policies and procedures that support the social and emotional well-being of educators and others who interact with the children.** In settings with multiple educators, consider staffing plans that assign additional staff to complement core staff to increase support. When possible, consult with early childhood mental health professionals so each educator can receive supports for their own well-being as well as for their practices to promote children's social, emotional, and behavioral health. See Guideline Area 3 for additional guidance on supporting staff well-being.
-  **Arrange for professional development, including online learning, reflective supervision, mentorship, and coaching, on developing a social-emotional climate that strengthens the overall learning environment for the children.** Communities of practice within or across preschool settings can offer educators opportunities to collaborate, learning from each other's experiences. Confirm that professional development resources and offerings are aligned with the *California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations* (PTKLF) and, for children younger than 3 years old, the *Infant-Toddler Learning and Development Foundations* (ITLDF) in the Social and Emotional Development domain. The foundations highlight the importance of relationships, attachment, responsiveness and respect, emotional knowledge, and regulation of emotions. Professional development should also promote educators' social and emotional competencies, such as self-awareness, regulation of emotions and stress, and social awareness.

- Arrange for a responsive and sensitive social–emotional climate for children, taking time to collaborate with families to identify children’s individual needs, build strong emotional connections, and plan playful interactions.** Respond appropriately to children’s expression of emotion. Validate children’s emotions and facilitate communication about emotional experiences according to each child’s development, language, culture, **temperament tendencies**, communication style, and needs. Model appropriate expression and management of emotions and understand how adults’ emotions affect children. For example, incorporate play materials that help children identify their own feelings, such as a feelings wheel.



- Affirm children’s emerging identities to contribute to their sense of belonging.** Invite children to express themselves, engage in culturally relevant practices, and play with a variety of peers to learn about and value their peers’ emerging identities. Encourage children to treat others with fairness and to recognize unfairness in interactions with others. See Guideline Area 5 for additional guidance on affirming the identities and culture of children and families and promoting equity and inclusion in interactions among children.
- Use positive group management strategies, such as providing clear instructions, rules, and transition routines.** For example, an educator can set clear expectations supported by visual cues for participating in morning meetings or circle time and use timers and verbal prompts a few minutes before transitions. Support children to contribute to and take responsibility in a preschool community by assigning them helping roles and tasks. Include children in conversations about setting expectations and rules and invite their input, such as asking what attentive listening looks like, communicating about the helping roles they enjoy, or asking whether a timer is helpful for them.

- ★ **Partner with families to promote social and emotional competencies in children at home, such as managing emotions and behavior.** Learn from families about their values, preferences, and practices related to social and emotional competencies, such as how they guide their child’s expression of emotion or celebrate their child’s developing identity and abilities. For example, some families express emotions more internally and others more outwardly. Some families may value building a sense of pride in their emerging racial–ethnic identities and preserving and honoring their culture and traditions.

Key Consideration

Resources for Understanding Social and Emotional Development of Preschool-Aged Children

When building children’s social and emotional competencies and planning expectations and supports for children’s behavior that are developmentally appropriate, there are multiple resources for understanding the social and emotional development of preschool-aged children. In the Social and Emotional Development domain, the [**PTKLF**](#) describes the learning and development of children aged 3 through 5 years in high-quality early education programs related to self, interactions, and relationships with adults and interactions and relationships with peers. Additionally, [**Preschool Through Third Grade \(P–3\) Learning Progressions in Social and Emotional Development**](#) builds on the PTKLF to show how foundational social and emotional skills continue to develop from preschool through third grade. The PTKLF and the P–3 Learning Progressions in Social and Emotional Development also include supportive practices and in-practice examples for social and emotional competencies such as building emotional knowledge, discussing similarities and differences across people, and resolving conflict with peers. For younger children in preschool settings, the [**ITLDF**](#) in Social and Emotional Development describes the development of infants and toddlers from birth to age 3 in the areas of social understanding and empathy, as well as interactions with caregivers and peers. Importantly, the resources present how social and emotional development is critical for children’s well-being and relationship building and promotes equity and inclusion.

Guideline 6.4. Provide guidance to set developmentally appropriate expectations for children's behavior and establish behavioral supports.

-  **Establish a clear approach to promoting and supporting appropriate and safe behavior, which might be multitiered, starting with a policy to set clear guidance and expectations for all children's behavior.** Examine and reflect on expectations for behavior in the early learning and care setting. This might include how to participate in routines and schedules, socialize with peers, and resolve conflicts with peers. For example, the California Teaching Pyramid is an evidence-based approach that promotes social and emotional development, provides support for children's appropriate behavior, prevents challenging behavior, and addresses problematic behavior.
-  **Reflect on social and emotional competencies that children may still be developing that impact their play, social interactions with peers, and regulation of emotions and behavior.** Consider whether it is beneficial to introduce the skills to the whole group or a small group of children and which interactive materials would help children learn through stories, role play, play, and conversation. In addition, steps for supporting behavior that may be disruptive in a group setting might include providing alternatives for behavior that does not adhere to expectations, followed by implementing targeted behavioral supports or intervention as needed. For example, if a 4-year-old child is throwing toys or materials during indoor play time or center time, an educator might first wonder aloud about the emotion the child is expressing and remind them of expectations to keep toys in their personal space so that others are not hurt. The educator might then calmly and in a nonshaming or nonjudgmental way offer the child an opportunity to move their body in a different way or toss soft balls into a basket away from other children. When the child is calm, the educator can ask the child how they can be safe with toys and explain to the child safe items to throw and where.

- 
Build awareness of the evidence on bias and disproportionality in discipline in early education settings. Exclusionary disciplinary practices that remove children from the learning environment are harmful to children, yet they are often used in early education settings, and more so with Black children and boys of color than with White children (California Department of Education [CDE], 2022). The resource [Creating Equitable Early Learning Environments for Young Boys of Color](#) (CDE, 2022) provides information on disproportionality in exclusionary disciplinary practices based on race, ethnicity, gender, and disability and on how to disrupt such practices to promote equity.

- 
Arrange for professional development on practices for understanding and addressing children's behavior and setting expectations for behavior as part of promoting social and emotional competencies. Consider developmentally appropriate ways to encourage and support expected behaviors, for example, teaching and practicing expected behaviors or replacement behaviors when children are in a regulated state. Scripted stories with simple language and photographs can serve as a tool for supporting children's understanding of expected behavior during routines and activities (CA Teaching Pyramid, n.d.).

- 
Encourage educators to reflect on their own practice and beliefs around behavior and to interpret behavior as children's meaningful communication of their emotions and needs. To do this, educators periodically engage in observation and documentation to learn about children's behavior. They notice children's strengths, consider the influences and experiences driving children's behavior, and consider what they are communicating through their behavior, in addition to noting concerns around behavior. Educators can find clues about why children engage in the behavior by documenting what happened just before and after the behavior as well as gathering insight from families about outside factors that could be impacting the child's emotional and sensory regulation, such as minor or major life events. Look for trends in the information gathered that might illuminate a reason that led to the behavior. Identify potential behaviors that can be taught so children can express their needs in a different way. Lastly, encourage educators to notice when a behavior may be activating a response in themselves and reflect on reasons the behavior activates them.

 Collaborate with families to understand what the child may be trying to communicate through their behavior and partner to support the child to be successful in the setting.

Discuss families' cultural beliefs and expectations for their children's behavior and build a shared understanding to strengthen connections between what happens in the home context with what happens in the early learning and care setting. For example, where possible, incorporate elements of routines that families carry out at home or behaviors that families prioritize at home, such as helping to clean up.

 Implement targeted behavioral supports or intervention in collaboration and consultation with the child's family, behavioral or developmental specialists, early interventionists, and mental health professionals in the setting to address the child's behavior and plan supports for the child's behavior.

Partner to understand what the child intends to communicate through their behavior and plan supports to help children manage their behavior, including how educators respond in the moment, and teach new, more effective behaviors that maintain children's relationships and value their individual strengths, interests, and needs. When a child's behavior is consistently dysregulated, collaborate with the child's family as well as specialists supporting the child in taking steps as a team to identify why the child may be engaging in the behavior and then choose a strategy to prevent the behavior, respond in the moment, and teach missing skills. Continuously reflect on the impact of the behavioral supports. It may be helpful to identify a tool to help guide team discussions around a child's dysregulated behavior.



In-Practice Example: Reflecting on Developmentally Appropriate Expectations for Behavior

Mr. Roberts serves as preschool director at an elementary school district and oversees several preschool classes located at different elementary school sites. In a meeting with educators from learning environments with 3- and 4-year-olds, Ms. Gupta, an educator, and her assistant, Mr. Clayborn, bring up that they have several children in their learning environment who are moving around the room instead of sitting on their carpet squares during large group activities like circle time and story time, and they find the behavior to be disruptive. Mr. Roberts first reflects with educators, inviting them all to share how they provide multiple models and supports for expected behavior in the learning environment, such as songs to signal how to participate during circle time and step-by-step guidance on what attentive listening looks like (e.g., eye contact, bodies facing inward, ears listening, calm voices). One educator brings up that a child's family has shared that at home they love to celebrate their child's energy and let their child move around freely. This comment starts a conversation about circle time as a practice in the preschool setting and having expectations for children at circle time that are developmentally appropriate. The educators consider where they and other staff can further align expectations with families' expectations. Mr. Roberts brainstorms with the educators about how they can ensure that the amount of time children are expected to sit for circle time is not too long and provide options for children to lie down, sit on a wobble cushion, or stand during circle time. They also discuss how they can plan the schedule in order for circle time to occur after outdoor play or for circle time to include opportunities to be more active, like having a story time in which children act out a familiar story or beginning circle time with a music and movement activity.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS CA Teaching Pyramid, <https://cainclusion.org/teachingpyramid/>
- » CDSS California Teaching Pyramid Framework Information Sheet, https://cainclusion.org/resources/camap/CACSEFEL/CACSEFEL_TP_InfoSheet_Updated.2025.10.21.pdf
- » CDSS Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations, <https://californiaearlylearninganddevelopment.org/educators/infant-toddler/foundations/>
- » CDE Creating Equitable Early Learning Environments for Young Boys of Color, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/boysofcolor.pdf>
- » CDE Preschool Through Third Grade (P–3) Learning Progressions, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/p3/>
- » CDE Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>
- » CDE The Powerful Role of Play in Early Education, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/powerfulroleofplay.pdf>
- » CDE Social and Emotional Learning in California, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/documents/selresourcesguide.pdf>

Page left intentionally blank

Supporting Children's Learning and Development



Guideline Area 7: Planning the Curriculum and the Learning Environment

Preschool is a unique and important stage in a child's development. During the preschool years, children rapidly grow their skills across development in approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language and literacy, mathematics, physical development, and more. They continue to expand their knowledge and ways of exploring the world around them through play-based and interactive group learning activities. For example, they develop a deeper understanding of numbers. They also begin to form friendships

with peers, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and communicate in full sentences. These early learning experiences prepare them for early elementary school and beyond. Take time to review the **California Preschool Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations** (PTKLF) to learn more about children's development through the preschool years. The PTKLF describes the knowledge and skills most children ages 3 through 5 typically develop in high-quality, equitable early learning settings. Additionally, to have a more comprehensive understanding of how early knowledge and skills develop over time,



consult the [Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations](#) (ITLDF), which describes development from birth to age 3, and the [Preschool Through Third Grade \(P–3\) Learning Progressions](#), which show the correspondence between the PTKLF and existing kindergarten through third grade state standards and resources in the field.

To foster learning across all areas of development, the **curriculum** and learning **environment** should emphasize integrated, play-based learning. Play is the primary way young children learn and is essential for brain development (Hassinger-Das et al., 2017). Providing integrated play-based learning includes a mix of indoor and outdoor play, along with both child-led and adult-led activities. Play provides children with valuable opportunities to learn how to solve increasingly complex problems and engage in challenging tasks (Koepp et al., 2022; Vaisorova & Reynolds, 2022; Zhu et al., 2024). For more information on the value of play and how to plan, **scaffold**, and assess learning through play, see [The Powerful Role of Play in Early Education](#).

Planning preschool curriculum and learning environments begins with careful observation of children’s interests, abilities, strengths, and needs. Each child brings their own way of learning and is on their own developmental trajectory. When educators mindfully observe, they discover how individual children make meaning in everyday moments of play, exploration, and interaction. For example, an educator may observe a child painting pictures of their family, revealing emotional connections and storytelling skills. This observation can be documented by taking a photo of the child’s artwork and writing a short note describing the child’s explanation of the picture. During reflection, educators, families, and children can revisit these pieces of documentation together—discussing what family means to the child—which then inspires new activities, such as creating a family tree collage. Documentation creates a record of development over time, and reflection serves as a springboard for developing ways to explore more deeply a topic that has engaged the interest of the children. Reflection also offers an opportunity to consider what has worked well, areas for change, and accommodations to meet individual needs.

Ongoing observation, documentation, and reflection is foundational to curriculum planning. Policies to support ongoing observation, documentation, and reflection include using effective tools, offering professional development, and fostering a reflective culture. For example, dedicated time for observation, documentation, and reflection might be built into daily or weekly schedules, such as during nap times or regular meetings between educators. When an educator does not have other educators or staff to meet with, reflection can still happen through taking brief notes, engaging in a quick check-in with the family, or revisiting the documentation with the child. Having policies and procedures around how to share observations and documentations with families and other staff can support how educators engage in meaningful reflections. Engaging in this cycle helps educators create responsive and meaningful learning experiences for young children.

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 7 is provided below.

Guideline Area 7

Planning the Curriculum and the Learning Environment

- **Guideline 7.1.** Establish an environment that is predictable and supportive and promotes a sense of belonging and community for everyone.
- **Guideline 7.2.** Organize and prepare indoor and outdoor environments to support children's learning and development.
- **Guideline 7.3.** Offer developmentally appropriate materials that encourage play, exploration, and learning in all domains.
- **Guideline 7.4.** Establish routines and schedules that are predictable while also flexible to meet the interests and needs of individual children.
- **Guideline 7.5.** Engage in a collaborative curriculum planning process that includes observation, documentation, and reflection on children's learning and development.
- **Guideline 7.6.** Plan learning experiences across developmental domains based on knowledge of child development and the individual strengths and needs of children.

Guideline 7.1. Establish an environment that is predictable and supportive and promotes a sense of belonging and community for everyone.

-  **Design learning environments where children, families, and educators feel a sense of safety and belonging.** The environment makes a strong impression on young children and their families when they enter the early learning and care setting. Consider what people see first as they enter the space. Displaying posters and information to families in their home language or culturally representative artwork such as tribal designs or baskets can help build stronger connections with families. Photo displays enable children to see their own family as part of the early learning and care setting and to learn about other children and families. For example, families might share photos of winter activities to display “what we do in the winter.”
-  **Consider how the environment supports relationships with children, families, and educators.** For example, a comfortable chair or small couch can provide a space where families can take a moment with their child at the beginning and the end of the day to support the relationship between a child and a family member during the key moments of separation.
-  **Provide consistent organization of learning spaces to support children’s sense of security.** When children know where different types of play will be set up and where they can find materials for play, they are confident and engaged. At times, adjustments may be made in response to children’s interests. Educators can make thoughtful temporary changes to spaces to accommodate and extend children’s play while they maintain an overall predictable environment. For example, they can expand an outdoor garden area or move puzzles or an indoor easel outdoors.

-  **Implement strategies that establish responsive, nurturing relationships and foster a sense of belonging for all children.** For example, establish a consistent **routine** for greeting children and families when they arrive in the morning and when the day ends. Consider greeting families in their home languages, when possible. Responsive, predictable interactions and secure relationships are especially critical for children who experienced stress, uncertainty, or barriers to participation, including multilingual learners, children with disabilities, and children receiving services from child protective services.
-  **Establish policies that encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings and to solve problems together when there are conflicts.** Learning to resolve conflicts and to express feelings reduces challenging behaviors and supports a collaborative learning environment. See Guideline 6.4 for more information about developmentally appropriate expectations for children's behavior and behavioral supports.

Key Consideration

The Importance of Play in Children's Learning and Development

Play is a primary context for learning in the preschool years and offers joyful opportunities for learning and development across domains. As children play, they engage in social interactions, creativity, self-expression, thinking, problem-solving, and inquiry-based learning (Cankaya et al., 2023; Yogman et al., 2018; Zosh et al., 2018). Through playful learning experiences, preschool children explore their environment, exercise their autonomy, learn from each other, and expand their understanding of the world around them. High-quality preschool settings value play and offer children a balance of child-led and educator-guided play activities to promote children's interest and engagement in learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020). Play also gives educators a natural way to observe and document children's skills, interests, and progress while they are actively engaged in exploration and learning.

Guideline 7.2. Organize and prepare indoor and outdoor environments to support children's learning and development.

-  **Maintain safe, comfortable, and engaging indoor and outdoor environments that support children's play, learning, and development.** Environments that are thoughtfully designed create opportunities for children's self-initiated play and their learning and development across domains. Ensure all spaces are accessible to all children, including walkways that are wide enough for walkers and wheelchairs and spaces that have enough space to move around in and play.
-  **Create defined indoor physical spaces that promote children's play, exploration, and interactions with peers.** Through play, children build their cognitive, social–emotional, and physical skills. For example, set up larger spaces for group activities like big body play or morning story time and small spaces for smaller group play, like a place for building blocks, creating art, or exploring books. Other areas might include a space to work with puzzles or a dramatic play area with props that represent objects at home. Partner with families to get ideas about what to include in dramatic play areas. Think about how these spaces can support children with disabilities and developmental delays. For example, children with mobility aids may need ample space to move around during big body play. See Guideline 8.5 for more information about supporting children with disabilities and developmental delays.
-  **Provide calming spaces where children can rest, regulate, or take a break when they feel overwhelmed and want a break.** For example, provide a calming space in a corner away from bright lights and loud noises. This area may include soft blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, and books, reflecting children's culture through patterned fabrics, textiles, or family-contributed books and objects. This area may also include feeling or emotion cards to help children identify and name how they feel. Spaces that are calming may especially benefit children with sensory needs. Guiding children in how to use quiet spaces supports their social and emotional development.

- Set up defined, safe, inclusive outdoor play spaces that encourage children to engage in physical activities, problem-solving, and exploration.** For example, areas to play with balls and create art or areas with smooth surfaces to ride bikes and scooters can offer children opportunities to support gross motor and manipulative skills (see PTKLF Physical Development



Foundation 1.7). Create activities for outdoor play that reflect children's culture and lived experiences. For example, provide outdoor music time, dancing, and games that children play with families and within their community.

- Use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to set up the indoor and outdoor spaces so every child can fully engage in play and learning in ways that honor their individual strengths, needs, and backgrounds.** Physical spaces can be arranged in ways that offer multiple means of engagement. For example, placing sensory bins at different heights, such as on tabletops, so all children—including those who use wheelchairs or have limited mobility—can easily reach and participate. Display visual schedules and routine steps in multiple accessible locations and formats, such as at children's eye level, with images and words in the languages spoken by the children or with tactile symbols. Visual schedules provide structure and understanding that can make routines more manageable and foster a sense of belonging for all children. For more information about how to intentionally design an environment, see [Universal Design for Learning: A Checklist for Early Childhood Environments](#) (Center on Technology and Disability, 2017).

- Adapt the physical spaces as necessary to fit with the current interests and projects of children in the group.** For example, a cardboard puppet station might take up part of the room for several days while children continue to add to and expand it.



In-Practice Example: Working With Community to Update Outdoor Spaces

Ms. Sanchez is planning updates to the shared outdoor play space at her child care center, which serves children from 3 years old until kindergarten entry. She wants the updates to promote learning through play across developmental domains. Ms. Sanchez meets with the educators at her center to discuss the updates that they would like to see. She also shares a survey with families to ask what they'd like to see in the outdoor play space and how they can help make the changes. The educators have asked if the outdoor space could include a quiet space for children who need a break from loud active play. In response to the educator and family suggestions, Ms. Sanchez has decided to add a cozy reading area outdoors. Ms. Sanchez asks a family member who indicated on their survey that they are a contractor to lead the family volunteers to build a covered playhouse. Other families donate outdoor cushions and books about nature to fill the playhouse. This space supports children in regulating their emotions by providing the opportunity to move themselves away from loud play. It also brings early literacy experiences outside. The playhouse also may inspire children to engage in dramatic play.

Guideline 7.3. Offer developmentally appropriate materials that encourage play, exploration, and learning in all domains.

- ✿ **Select developmentally appropriate materials that reflect children’s interests, developing abilities, strengths, and needs.** Doing so helps create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where all children can participate and thrive.



- ✿ **Provide materials that support learning across all developmental domains.** For example, books not only support children’s literacy skills, but also can encourage children to learn about emotions and explore concepts like opposites or quantities. Likewise, manipulatives such as blocks, tiles, paper, clay, or household items like buttons or cotton balls promote sorting, classifying, counting, and building skills. Arts and crafts activities support children’s creativity while also strengthening fine motor skills that are essential for learning to write.
- ✿ **Offer a variety of open-ended materials—such as clay, building blocks, natural items like leaves, sticks, and stones, and recycled objects like boxes and tubes, as well as art supplies like paper, crayons, and paint—to foster children’s creativity, exploration, and collaborative problem-solving.** Open-ended materials encourage children to create, engage in pretend play, explore, and work together to come up with creative solutions to problems (see more on these skills and behaviors in the PTKLF Approaches to Learning (ATL), Foundation 3.3 Problem-Solving Together). For example, in a garden area, children might use sticks, stones, and recycled containers to design planters or create a pretend “farm stand.”

-  **Provide developmentally appropriate play equipment that offers opportunities for vigorous and challenging movement both indoors and outdoors.** Offering climbing structures, like obstacle courses, and a designated space gives children opportunities for active play, helping them build important motor skills and coordination. For example, obstacle courses provide playful opportunities to build children's gross motor skills, balance, and spatial awareness (see more on these skills and behaviors in the PTKLF Physical Development Foundation 1.2 Balancing in Motion and 1.7 Gross Motor Manipulative Skills).
-  **Include a wide variety of materials, books, and visuals that reflect the diversity of the children, families, and community being served.** Gather information from children and families to guide selection of materials and visuals that are reflective of children's families, their cultural and linguistic experiences, and their varied abilities. For example, create an area with family photos, books in children's home languages that families recommend, or objects children have at home. Representing children in the environment supports their sense of belonging and identity (see PTKLF Social Emotional Development Foundation 1.1 Self-Identity).
-  **Observe children's development to identify and provide a variety of materials based on their interests and emerging skills.** For example, if children are beginning to show improved hand-eye coordination and an interest in stacking blocks to create tall towers, a selection of wooden planks and foam bricks or magnetic tiles can be added to the play area. Having access to a variety of materials gives children the opportunity to design and construct their own structures, encouraging children to plan and carry out investigations (see more on this skill in the PTKLF Science Foundation 1.6 Planning and Carrying Out Investigations).

 Provide materials in varied ways to keep children engaged and excited about learning.

While most learning areas and materials usually remain consistent to help children know where to find things, occasionally rotating materials or placing them in new locations can spark curiosity and creativity. This practice encourages children to ask questions, try out new ideas, and experiment with familiar materials in different contexts (see more on these skills and behaviors in the PTKLF ATL Foundation 1.1 Curiosity and Interest). For example, introduce measuring tools into the dramatic play area or offer materials in unexpected settings, like placing blocks or art supplies outdoors.

Key Consideration

Technology in the Preschool Setting

Technology can be a useful tool in preschool settings when used intentionally and in developmentally appropriate ways. Research shows that technology supports learning best when it promotes active engagement and is used with adult guidance, rather than as passive screen time (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2023). Well-chosen digital tools can encourage exploration, creativity, communication, and shared problem-solving when they are thoughtfully integrated into learning experiences. At the same time, evidence indicates that excessive or unguided screen use can limit opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and sustained attention, particularly when technology replaces hands-on learning (Council on Communications and Media, 2016; Panjeti-Madan & Ranganathan, 2023). For these reasons, technology in preschool settings should be used sparingly, for clear learning purposes, and always alongside responsive adult interaction that connects digital experiences to children's real-world play and relationships.

Guideline 7.4. Establish routines and schedules that are predictable while also flexible to meet the interests and needs of individual children.

-  **Establish routines that are predictable and consistent.** Routines support the development of self-regulation and independence as children learn what to expect and how to manage transitions. They also foster positive social interactions and cooperation among children. For educators, consistent routines make learning environment management more effective and allow for more meaningful learning experiences.
-  **Create a schedule that incorporates time for daily routines and a balance between educator-guided and child-led learning experiences.** A typical schedule might include time for drop-off routines, mealtimes and snacks, child-led indoor and outdoor play, and educator-guided activities. Creating a visual of these routines and placing it where children can access it helps them know what to expect during the day and can make transitions between routines easier. A balanced routine keeps children engaged throughout the day and supports children's development and learning across domains.
-  **Establish routines and schedules that enable all children to participate fully in routines.** Drawing on UDL principles, offer multiple ways for children to access the steps in routines and participate in routines, such as visual schedules with pictures and words, verbal reminders, and hands-on cues. Allowing flexibility to meet individual needs and preferences helps every child participate and feel included throughout the day. For example, if a child prefers to start with a quiet activity before joining the group, the educator provides that option, honoring individual preferences and needs.

-  **Ask families about their routines at home and involve them in co-creating routines for the preschool setting.** Provide opportunities—such as family questionnaires, meetings, or informal chats—for families to share what works for their child and to help shape routines together. When families are involved in shaping routines, children feel a stronger sense of belonging and comfort, which supports their emotional well-being. Shared routines can also help children develop self-regulation and initiative, as familiar patterns make transitions smoother and more predictable.
-  **Develop clear procedures about toileting, meals, naps, and arrival and departure routines.** Consider children’s developmental needs when creating these procedures. For example, children still in diapers may need frequent diaper changes and more adult help, while those with more toileting experience can be encouraged to use the bathroom more independently. Tailoring procedures to the developmental needs of the children helps ensure that routines are appropriate and supportive.
-  **Keep families and children informed of any changes to routines and schedules.** If possible, alert everyone ahead of time and describe the change in the routine and schedule and what will happen now instead.
-  **Provide resources for staff on the importance of flexible routines and offer examples and strategies for adapting to children’s strengths and needs.** Create a supportive environment in which educators feel empowered to adjust routines as necessary, for example, extending outdoor play when children are highly engaged or adding a short transition activity when the group needs extra support. Regular feedback and collaborative discussions can also encourage educators to share ideas and reflect on what works best for their group.
-  **Structure routines to include time for children to do things as independently as possible, with the level of support needed to be successful.** For example, allowing children to set out their own nap mats or choose and serve their own snacks gives them opportunities to practice self-help skills and make decisions throughout the day. Building these practices into daily schedules helps foster children’s initiative and confidence.

-  **Offer children a manageable selection of developmentally appropriate choices whenever possible.** Create schedules that include opportunities for free play, where children can select activities and materials that interest them, such as choosing between building with blocks, painting at the easel, or exploring sensory bins. Other opportunities to offer choices include allowing children to pick between different fruits at snack time or decide whether to use crayons, markers, or collage materials during an art activity. Choices within consistent routines provide children with a sense of control that helps them regulate their emotions and behavior and manage transitions more easily.

Key Consideration

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Developmentally appropriate practice, or DAP, refers to approaches that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach that is joyful and engaging. Through the use of DAP, experiences are planned that align with children's ages, individual strengths and needs, and cultural and family backgrounds. Young children learn best through developmentally appropriate play, hands-on exploration, and emotionally connected, responsive relationships.

With DAP, growth is supported across key developmental areas, including language and literacy, early math, self-regulation, motor skills, and social-emotional development. It also helps ensure learning is inclusive and appropriately challenging so children can make progress at their own pace and build confidence.

Intentional teaching is emphasized in DAP—observing and documenting children's learning, using that information to plan and individualize instruction, and providing scaffolds and adaptations so all children can participate fully, including dual language learners and children with disabilities. Strong partnerships with families are central to DAP, ensuring that learning goals and approaches reflect family strengths and support continuity between home and school.

Guideline 7.5. Engage in a collaborative curriculum planning process that includes observation, documentation, and reflection on children’s learning and development.

-  **Observe as children interact, play, and explore.** Observations support educators in understanding children’s learning and development and to inform planning.
-  **Document observations of children’s learning and development through written notes, photos, videos, and samples of children’s creations.** Documentation creates a record of children’s development over time. Consider involving children in the documentation process to support their learning and increase engagement—for example, displaying photos on the wall showing the different phases of planting flowers can spark interest and encourage participation. Reflect on observations and documentation of children using the PTKLF as a guide on expectations for children’s learning and development. Allocate time for reflection when not actively caring for or interacting with children. Reflection offers an opportunity to consider what has worked well, areas for change, and accommodations to meet individual needs.
-  **Review implementation of the observation, documentation, and reflection cycle to make sure it meets everyone’s needs.** Do staff have the support they need to engage in collaborative curriculum planning? For example, are there team meetings where educators can reflect on their observations and support each other in planning curriculum or other opportunities to collaborate with colleagues?
-  **Share with families principles of curriculum planning that are based on observation, documentation, interpretation, planning, and implementation.** Help families understand the goals and features of the curricula used in the learning environment.
-  **Collaborate with families and specialized service providers to plan and document the learning and development of children with disabilities or delays.** Together, co-develop measurable goals aligned with children’s Individualized Education Program (IEP or other support plan). Identify and implement appropriate accommodations within learning experiences so children have meaningful access to participation and their needs are met. Use ongoing documentation from home and school to regularly review progress and make decisions. For example, the family, educator, and provider can share notes to coordinate supports and adjust accommodations as needed.

Guideline 7.6. Plan learning experiences across developmental domains based on knowledge of child development and the individual strengths and needs of children in the setting.

-  **Identify and implement a developmentally appropriate approach to curriculum and materials.** A curriculum provides goals and guidance on the skills and knowledge children develop during preschool grounded in knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate practice.
-  **Plan learning experiences using knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate expectations as outlined in the PTKLF and in the curriculum resources.** Ongoing observations of children help educators identify strengths, interests, and needs. Together, these sources inform planning to ensure that learning experiences are responsive and meet the developmental needs of individual children.
-  **Implement active, hands-on activities that promote learning and development across domains.** Rich learning experiences support children's learning across domains. For example, time for music and movement and pretend play can promote language skills, social and emotional development, and motor skills. Building a structure together, such as a fort or a building in their community can challenge children's cognitive and motor skills. Children also practice their social and emotional skills as they play collaboratively with others.



-  **Engage children at the right level of challenge, offering activities that are not too easy or too difficult.** This level of challenge is called the **zone of proximal development** and refers to a task that is a little too difficult for a child to do on their own, but something they can achieve with some support from an adult or peer (Vygotsky, 1978). It is important to give each child time to solve problems they encounter and guide them by asking questions or offering suggestions.
-  **Arrange for professional development around the PTKLF and P–3 Learning Progressions to understand how developmental expectations in preschool sets the foundation for learning in early elementary grades.** Professional development around PTKLF and P–3 Learning Progressions offers opportunities for shared expectations and a common developmental lens. This helps educators design instruction that is developmentally appropriate while intentionally building the skills children need for success.
-  **Develop policies that look ahead to children’s transition to early elementary grade levels.** Understanding development through the early elementary grades supports a stronger understanding of development during preschool. The P–3 Learning Progressions provide guidance on children’s development in key domains from preschool through third grade.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations, <https://californiaearlylearninganddevelopment.org/educators/infant-toddler/foundations/>
- » CDE Preschool Through Third Grade (P–3) Learning Progressions, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/p3/>
- » CDE Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>
- » CDE The Powerful Role of Play in Early Education, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/powerfulroleofplay.pdf>
- » Center on Technology and Disability Universal Design for Learning: A Checklist for Early Childhood Environments, https://va-leads-ecse.org/Document/zxblhX_YCJNMoZ8Ys3rgdvERGbr0g1ZW/ADA-UDL-Checklist-EC.pdf
- » NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement, https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/dap_ps_final.pdf
- » NASEM: A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/27429>

Guideline Area 8: Supporting the Learning and Development of Children With Disabilities

Over the past 40 years, changes in both state and federal laws and in public policies and attitudes have resulted in increasing numbers of young **children with disabilities or developmental delays** participating with all other children in early learning and care settings (Barton et al., 2025). Federal laws, especially the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990), protect the rights of children with disabilities or developmental delays.

The IDEA requires that children with disabilities or developmental delays be educated with all other children to the greatest extent possible. The ADA prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for people of all ages with disabilities or developmental delays. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act, 1973) prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in settings receiving federal financial assistance and requires reasonable accommodations (referred to as 504 plans). The U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a joint policy statement that sets the expectation for the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs (ED & HHS, 2023). In addition, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) developed a joint position statement that strongly supports inclusion practices in early childhood settings (DEC & NAEYC, 2009). Additionally, the recognition of rightful presence shifts the focus from “including” children

with disabilities or developmental delays as guests in settings designed for others to presuming they belong in all settings for children from the start, with settings sharing responsibility to change environments, practices, and power relationships so children and families can participate fully (Adams, 2025; SWIFT Education Center, 2025).

Educators in high-quality preschool settings regard children with disabilities or developmental delays as *children first* and as children with disabilities or developmental delays second. They holistically consider all aspects of the child, including their individual temperament tendencies, learning strengths, interests, and needs in setting learning goals and planning activities. Likewise, families of children with disabilities or developmental delays are acknowledged as having the same kinds of concerns for their child's well-being and progress as all families do (Barton et al., 2025). Additionally, children benefit when educators plan ahead to adjust the environment, interactions, communication, and instruction to support children with disabilities or developmental delays. Children learn best when they are offered choices, the supports they need, and more than one way to access information to work through ideas and show what they know (Sandall et al., 2024).

Being recognized as a high-quality preschool setting will likely not be sufficient to adequately meet the individual learning needs of children with disabilities or developmental delays. Successful inclusion requires collaboration among professionals, specialized instruction, and organizational supports such as ongoing coaching and mentoring to ensure high-quality inclusion practices (Johns et al., 2024; Steed et al., 2023; Warren et al., 2016). When these supports are in place, educators can successfully serve children with disabilities or developmental delays seamlessly and thus contribute to children's positive outcomes, such as the development of peer relationships and engagement in learning (Futterer et al., 2023). Inclusion benefits not just children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families, but all children in the preschool setting, for everyone learns about acceptance and appreciation of individual differences (ED & HHS, 2023).

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 8 is provided below.

Guideline Area 8

Supporting the Learning and Development of Children With Disabilities

- **Guideline 8.1.** Collaborate with families, individuals with disabilities, and community partners to establish a shared purpose for serving children with disabilities and their families.
- **Guideline 8.2.** Work closely in partnership with families and provide them with information on community resources and support that relates to the child's disability.
- **Guideline 8.3.** Develop and implement policies and practices that meet legal requirements related to inclusion.
- **Guideline 8.4.** Ensure that educators have the necessary time, training, information, and support to fully participate on Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 teams with families and specialized service providers.
- **Guideline 8.5.** Implement appropriate modifications in the curriculum, instructional methods, and learning environments to ensure a sense of belonging and full participation by children with disabilities.
- **Guideline 8.6.** Provide appropriate supports for multilingual learners with disabilities in collaboration with specialized service providers such as education specialists and therapists.

Guideline 8.1. Collaborate with families, individuals with disabilities, and community partners to establish a shared purpose for serving children with disabilities and their families.

 **Make the inclusion of children with disabilities or developmental delays in preschool settings a priority.** Uphold the values, vision, philosophy, leadership, and commitment necessary to integrate inclusive practices into all aspects of the setting. One way of doing this is by collaborating with families to create and share an inclusion statement that affirms the rightful presence of children with disabilities or developmental delays in the early care and education setting. See the [Impact Inclusion Workgroup's inclusion vision and mission statement](#) as an example to guide this work. As part of prioritizing inclusion, center- or school-based settings may create inclusion leadership teams. These teams can include families of children with and without disabilities or developmental delays, adults with disabilities or developmental delays, educators, specialized service providers, and community organizations. When included in a leadership inclusion team, community partners should be representative of the families being served (race, ethnicity, income, languages, etc.) and may include health partners and behavior support providers (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center & National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2023). Educators in child care homes may seek support from colleagues, community organizations, and specialized service providers to formulate an inclusion statement that articulates their guiding principles.

-  **Use the inclusion statement and research on child development as guides for creating and implementing policies and procedures that support the learning and development of children with disabilities or developmental delays.** Areas to consider include the access, participation, and support of children with disabilities or developmental delays, as well as the language used to refer to individuals with disabilities or developmental delays. For example, discuss with families their preferences around person-first (“child who is Deaf”) or identity-first (“Deaf child”) language.
-  **Use strengths-based, equity-focused communication about all children, especially children with diverse learning needs.** Regularly reflect on the language used in conversations, documentation, and family communications to ensure it reduces bias and supports inclusion. Model respectful ways of talking about disability and developmental delays to help shift mindsets that can create barriers to children’s sense of belonging and participation.
-  **Maintain an understanding of the legal requirements and ethical considerations involved in creating and sustaining an inclusive environment for all children.** This can include accessing expert resources from agencies such as local county offices of education, school districts, [Special Education Local Plan Areas](#), and [Early Start](#).

Guideline 8.2. Work closely in partnership with families and provide them with information on community resources and support that relates to the child’s disability.

-  **Build welcoming relationships by being open, sensitive, and caring right from the first meeting with families and onward.** Establish trust through being consistently available, maintaining confidentiality, and demonstrating that every child and family is valued and respected.
-  **Collaborate with families and specialized service providers to meet children’s needs.** Work as a team, allowing each member to contribute expertise, set shared goals, plan individualized supports—including **Individualized Education Programs** (IEPs) and 504 plans—and solve problems together, focusing on what matters most to both the child and the family. Ensure that families are aware of their right to bring a trusted support person to IEP and 504 plan meetings to help them participate fully and stay focused on shared goals for their child. Many individuals can take on the role of a trusted support person, including family members, friends, and professional advocates.
-  **Build trusting relationships with families to help them access evaluation and support services.** Connect families to resources, including **Family Empowerment Centers** and **Family Resource Centers**. Support families as they decide whether to go to their local school district for evaluations and special services. Continue to partner with families as they get the services and support they need.



✿ **Provide ongoing support through children’s transitions, whether to new preschool settings or early elementary school.** Using timely strategies that reflect thoughtful consideration of the individual child and family can ease adjustments and promote positive outcomes for them. For community-based preschool settings, including family child care homes, establish a working relationship with the local educational agency, school district, or county office of education to clarify points of contact and a process for coordinating services and supporting children with IEPs and 504 plans. For more information, see Guideline 4.3 on transitions to early elementary school.

✿ **Partner with families, specialized service providers, and community organizations to support children’s transitions within and between settings throughout the day.** Creating consistent routines and preparing children for upcoming transitions during the day can help reduce anxiety and make transitions less stressful. With families’ consent, exchange information before, during, and after transitions with other service providers.



In-Practice Example: Co-Planning With Families: Documenting Concerns and Navigating the Referral Process

Aiden's family enrolled him in Meiko and Cam's family child care home two months ago, shortly before his 4th birthday. During initial interviews, his parents, Quinn and Jackson, shared concerns about his speech and language. Aiden's parents described how they have trouble understanding Aiden in both of their home languages (Spanish and English) and how Aiden gets frustrated at not being understood. They noticed that Aiden's grandmother, who recently visited for the first time in almost a year, struggled to understand Aiden when they were speaking Spanish. Aiden's parents also shared that Aiden primarily communicates with one- or two-word phrases or gestures, instead of full sentences. Meiko and Cam documented the family's concerns and collaborated with them to create a plan to observe and document Aiden's speech. Meiko and Cam printed out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Milestones by 4 Years" flyer for Aiden's family and used it to guide their conversations about what to expect at his age and when to seek additional support.

Since then, the educators have worked together to observe Aiden's speech and created opportunities for him to converse with them and his peers in Spanish and English. They have tried several strategies to support Aiden's use of words, including inviting him to join in on songs and rhymes and asking open-ended questions. The educators have shared information from the observations regularly with the family at pick-ups and drop-offs, as well as during scheduled meetings. After gathering several weeks of data from observations, Meiko and Cam bring up the idea with Quinn and Jackson of having Aiden assessed for a speech and language delay through the local school district.

The educators explain the referral process, including current timelines, answer questions, share printed resources, and provide reassurance that the school district can conduct a formal assessment to help identify Aiden's needs. With the family's consent, the team completes the referral paperwork and offers continued support throughout the next steps, emphasizing their commitment to working together to help Aiden succeed.

Guideline 8.3. Develop and implement policies and practices that meet legal requirements related to inclusion.

-  **Work together to meet legal requirements and support each child's needs.** Team with families, specialized service providers, and community partners to engage in strategic, data-driven planning to support the development and implementation of IEPs and 504 plans. This can include using information from observations, screenings, progress monitoring, and family input to set shared goals, choose supports, and regularly review what is working so the team can adjust services and **adaptations** as needed. A collaborative approach supports a sense of belonging and success for children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families while creating opportunities for shared decision-making and joint problem-solving.
-  **Develop and communicate policies that meet all legal requirements.** This includes requirements related to IDEA, the ADA, and state laws, especially as they relate to families' rights and confidentiality. Make sure families and staff understand these rights and uphold confidentiality when gathering and sharing information about each child.
-  **Collaborate with specialized service providers to design environments and learning experiences that meet legal standards and support each child's unique strengths and needs.** Ensure educators are implementing adaptations and providing services as outlined in each child's IEP or 504 plan. Additionally, awareness of and training on children's specialized health care plans is essential. Partnering with families and trusting their expertise and knowledge about their child is critical in making sure each child's IEP or 504 plan is implemented realistically and effectively.

Guideline 8.4. Ensure that educators have the necessary time, training, information, and support to fully participate on Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 teams with families and specialized service providers.

-  **Build one's own and other educators' capacity by partnering with families and specialized service providers to ensure that educators have the resources and support needed to meet the needs of children with disabilities or developmental delays.** For example, arranging for joint training sessions with families and occupational therapists can help educators learn effective strategies and receive ongoing support in caring for children with disabilities or developmental delays.
-  **Arrange regular professional development, coaching, and reflection sessions for oneself and other educators in the setting to learn, collaborate, and share expertise.** Encourage teamwork by involving educators, families, and specialists in discussions about assessments, instructional planning, and progress monitoring. This can look like scheduling monthly workshops where an educator or educators collaboratively plan with families and specialists, engaging in coaching to review assessment data, and reflecting together on instructional strategies and child outcomes informally during the week as well as formally in planned team meetings.
-  **Ensure that educators who work directly with children are active members of educational teams, especially when IEPs and 504 plans are developed and implemented.** Arrange mentoring and, in larger settings, regular supervision so educators have the time and support to meet the unique needs of all children, including multilingual learners. Partner with language specialists and related service providers to help ensure IEP and 504 plan supports are culturally and linguistically responsive and aligned with each child's language and communication needs.

Guideline 8.5. Implement appropriate modifications in the curriculum, instructional methods, and learning environments to ensure a sense of belonging and full participation by children with disabilities.

-  **Design work areas and select learning materials that encourage children to interact and play together.** This enables children with disabilities to participate in meaningful and relevant ways as independently as possible, with the level of support they need to be successful. Engage each child by considering their strengths, preferences, and interests, setting meaningful learning goals, and planning the right level of support and accommodations to help every child grow and succeed. Children with disabilities or developmental delays may require additional support, accommodations, and modifications, such as environmental adaptations (e.g., limiting background noise and other distractions, using seating that is flexible), adaptations to materials (e.g., using a pencil grip, using visual cues), and instructional adaptations (e.g., modeling, prompting). Regularly collaborate with families and specialized service providers to adapt learning activities and experiences as needed, such as by modifying materials or breaking tasks into smaller steps, ensuring that every child can join in and learn.
-  **Arrange the physical environment with accessibility in mind so that children who move differently or use mobility devices can easily participate.** Make sure materials and activities are available whether children are sitting on the floor, standing, or using a wheelchair and allow for flexible seating options.
-  **Build strong teams with families and specialists so supports and services are planned together to meet each child's and family's unique needs.** Work closely with IEP and 504 teams, including speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, vision specialists, and education specialists, to understand accommodations and modifications as directed by each child's IEP or 504 plan.

-  **Provide services and supports in natural, inclusive environments as part of daily routines.** Apply **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles and work with families to adapt physical, social, and time-related aspects so every child can participate fully (CAST, 2026; Gordon, 2024). For example, ensure that circle time is inclusive by arranging seating to accommodate a child using a wheelchair, provide visual schedules and adaptable instruments to support diverse learning needs, and collaborate with families to adjust routines so every child can participate fully. Adaptations can be implemented so children's supports are integrated naturally into the learning environment, ensuring no child feels singled out.
-  **Plan how IEP and 504 plan goals and supports will be integrated into daily routines and activities.** Tools such as activity or support matrices (simple tables written in clear, shared language) can help educators understand what to do, when to do it, and how to support the child throughout the day. For example, the team might create a matrix for circle time that reminds educators to offer a child a wiggle seat or a specific fidget toy to support engagement and participation.



- ✿ **Work with families and other adults to identify needs for assistive technology, acquire or create appropriate devices, and use ongoing data gathering to individualize learning.** Educators can collaborate with families and specialists to acquire assistive technology, such as a high-tech tool like a tablet with a communication app or a light-tech communication board of picture choices, then regularly gather data on each child's progress to continue to individualize instruction and refine supports.

Key Consideration

Assistive Technology to Support Children With Disabilities or Developmental Delays

Assistive technology (AT) is defined under IDEA as any item that a child with disabilities or developmental delays uses to increase, improve, or maintain their functionality. Research has shown that AT supports children's movement and mobility, communication, independence during play, and interactions with peers (Lohmann et al., 2019). NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines (2020), the Division for Early Childhood's Recommended Practices (2014), and the Council for Exceptional Children and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center's high-leverage practices guidance (McLeskey et al., 2017) all support the use of AT in inclusive learning environments as a best practice.

Assistive technologies in settings serving preschool-aged children include a wide variety of both light- and high-tech tools, such as adaptive grips, wheelchairs, and electronic tablets. Supporting a functional communication approach may include working as a team to develop a communication toolbox for each child so the child can communicate in multiple ways. This may include gestures, communication boards, American Sign Language, and communication devices.

Guideline 8.6. Provide appropriate supports for multilingual learners with disabilities in collaboration with specialized service providers such as education specialists and therapists.

-  **Use an interdisciplinary team approach to support multilingual learners with disabilities or developmental delays.** Include educators and specialized service providers aligned to each child's learning needs (e.g., speech-language pathologists, bilingual specialists). Ensure that interventions and supports are comprehensive and coordinated. Work closely with specialized service providers to stay informed about current research, recognizing that children with diverse abilities and language development patterns are capable of learning more than one language.

-  **Partner with families and specialized service providers to design and implement interventions that support children's growth in both their home language and English.** Doing so builds a strong foundation for learning and development. Communicate clearly and respectfully to families that using multiple languages at home and in preschool does not cause language delays. Encourage families to keep using their home languages with their children as part of intervention plans.

-  **Communicate with families about how home languages support family culture and strong parent–child relationships.** Home languages support children's identity and sense of belonging and strengthen families' sense of competence and confidence, each of which contributes to children's learning and development. See Guideline Area 9 for more information on supporting the learning and development of multilingual learners.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS California Early Childhood Online (CECO) - Inclusion Works!
https://www.caearlychildhoodonline.org/en_modulecatalog.aspx?moduleId=1136
- » CDSS California Early Childhood Online (CECO) -
Inclusive Practices for Children with Delays and Disabilities,
https://www.caearlychildhoodonline.org/en_modulecatalog.aspx?moduleId=1159
- » CDSS California Early Childhood Online (CECO) -
Responsive and Inclusive Learning and Care Environments,
https://www.caearlychildhoodonline.org/en_modulecatalog.aspx?moduleId=1164
- » CDSS California MAP Early Identification Guide,
<https://cainclusion.org/camap/resource/early-identification-guide/>
- » CDSS California Teaching Pyramid, <https://cainclusion.org/teachingpyramid/about/>
- » CDSS Supporting Inclusive Early Learning: Working Together for Inclusion &
Belonging, <https://cainclusion.org/>
- » CDE California Educators Together Inclusion Toolkit,
<https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/resources/218446/inclusion-toolkit>
- » CDE California Special Education Local Plan Areas,
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/caselpas.asp>
- » CDE Family Empowerment Centers, <https://californiafamilyempowermentcenters.org/>
- » CDE Impact Inclusion Workgroup,
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/op/impactinclusionworkgroup.asp>
- » CDE Inclusive Early Education Resources,
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/op/ieeresources.asp>
- » California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Early Start Neighborhood,
<https://earlystartneighborhood.org/>
- » California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Family Resource Centers,
<https://www.dds.ca.gov/services/early-start/family-resource-center/>
- » National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, <https://www.challengingbehavior.org/>

Page left intentionally blank

Guideline Area 9: Supporting the Learning and Development of Multilingual Learners

Multilingualism is an asset that benefits children across multiple domains of learning and development. It contributes to their long-range success in school and their well-being and is therefore emphasized as a strength (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2024). Thus, early learning and care settings' philosophies should reflect a commitment to supporting and uplifting children's development in their home languages. Developing strong foundations in their home languages can support children's future learning and development in other languages (Raikes et al., 2019; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2014). In addition, supporting **multilingual learners'** home language development strengthens their overall learning and connects them with their families, cultures, and communities (Castro & Prishker, 2019). In settings where English is the language of instruction, the commitment to supporting and uplifting children's home language development occurs alongside intentional support for children's English language development (NASEM, 2017).

A multilingual learner is a child who is learning more than one language (CDE, 2024). Multilingual learners have diverse language experiences in their homes, communities, and early learning and care settings.

- Some multilingual learners use two or more languages at home. For example, a child might speak both Mandarin and Cantonese at home. Another child might use Tagalog to communicate with some family members at home and English to communicate with other family members at home.
- Some multilingual learners use one or more languages at home and are learning another for the first time in their preschool setting. For example, a child might use American Sign Language (ASL) at home and attend a preschool setting with instruction in ASL and spoken English. Another child might speak Spanish at home and learn English in their preschool experience in a family child care home. Yet another child may speak English with their family at home and attend a Hupa language revitalization program.
- Still other multilingual learners use a language other than English at home and the same language in the preschool setting while also acquiring some experience with English. For example, a child might speak Spanish at home and in their family child care setting while experiencing some English from their elementary-aged siblings or older children in the family child care home.

Key Consideration

Definitions

In this document, the term *multilingual learner* is used to refer to a child who is learning two or more languages at the same time (CDE, 2024). The term *multilingual learner* may overlap with or be inclusive of other frequently used terms, such as *dual language learner* or *multilingual child*. A dual language learner is a child learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. The term is often used for children from birth to 5 years (NASEM, 2017). Some settings will have specific requirements and guidance on how to identify children as dual language learners as part of the enrollment process. *Multilingual child* is another term that can refer to a child who is developing in two or more languages in the context of their family, community, or early learning and care setting (California Department of Social Services [CDSS], 2025b).

Providing high-quality early education and care for multilingual learners begins with recognizing and building on the full range of children's knowledge and skills. A first step in supporting the learning and development of multilingual learners is recognizing and affirming the depth and breadth of knowledge children are developing. Preschool-aged children may demonstrate their skills or knowledge using their home languages or any languages they are learning. The preschool setting should articulate and reflect a comprehensive approach to supporting children's development in any of the languages they use.

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 9 is provided below.

Guideline Area 9

Supporting the Learning and Development of Multilingual Learners

- **Guideline 9.1.** Promote the continued development of the child's home language, recognizing multilingualism as an asset.
- **Guideline 9.2.** Partner with families to support children's multilingual development.
- **Guideline 9.3.** Provide additional support for children's English language development and full participation in learning experiences when English is the language of instruction.
- **Guideline 9.4.** Use appropriate assessment tools and practices for multilingual learners.

Guideline 9.1. Promote the continued development of the child's home language, recognizing multilingualism as an asset.

-  **Write and uphold a statement, as part of the setting's overall philosophy statement, that describes the preschool setting's commitment to children's multilingual development.** Having a clearly defined language approach demonstrates to educators and families the importance of prioritizing children's home language development. See Guideline 1.1 for more information on developing and upholding a written philosophy statement.
-  **Arrange for all educators in the setting to receive ongoing professional training to understand and support multilingual development.** Through professional development, educators learn about multilingual development, including the fact that each multilingual learner has a unique developmental trajectory. Multilingual learners may know some vocabulary words in one language, some in another, and some in both or all of their languages. They may demonstrate their use of language at different times compared to peers who use only one language or they may apply rules from one language to another language they are learning. Educators learn how to provide opportunities for the child to demonstrate their knowledge and skills across all the languages they use, even when the educator does not share the child's language.
-  **Recognize and support children's abilities to understand and communicate in any of the languages they use.** For example, a child whose home language is Spanish might demonstrate their knowledge of numbers by counting in Spanish. Similarly, a child who does not yet use many English words or sentences may demonstrate their understanding of a story read in English by incorporating elements of the story in their pretend play or drawings. When educators do not share the child's other language, they can partner with another staff member, family member, or community member who shares the child's language to understand what the child is communicating.
-  **Recognize and support children's translanguaging as a natural aspect of multilingual development and communication. Translanguaging** is when an individual draws from each of their languages to meet different communication needs. For example, a child may use a mix of languages when expressing a single thought or sentence. Many children also understand when to use one language when communicating with one individual and another language with a different individual.

✿ Incorporate children's home languages into their environment and materials.

Provide children with access to storytelling, audio materials, books, signs, visuals, and labels in their home languages while keeping in mind that preschool-aged children are not expected to read independently. Providing these materials often requires family partnership and engagement. For example, educators might invite family members to record a story to share with the preschool setting or to visit the setting one morning to sing a song in their home language. For more information about promoting culturally and linguistically responsive and affirming policies and practices, see Guideline 5.1.

✿ Consider children's home languages as part of hiring and staffing practices. To provide rich language experiences in a child's home language, leaders in a setting with multiple educators, when possible, employ staff who share the home languages of children in the early education and care setting. Also consider children's home language when assigning existing staff who share children's home languages. When staff in a setting share a child's home language, arrange small-group learning activities with educators who can communicate with the child in their home language. For example, a Spanish-English bilingual educator in a family child care home that primarily serves Spanish-speaking children might engage in a gardening activity in Spanish.





In-Practice Example: Fostering Educators' Capabilities to Support the Learning and Development of Multilingual Learners

Julia, the director of a preschool center, is planning for the upcoming year. She knows that about half of the families who attend the preschool center speak Spanish at home. Julia knows that one of her educators, Alice, does not speak Spanish. Julia meets with Alice and another educator, Miguel, who speaks both Spanish and English. Alice and Miguel work well together, and the three educators decide that Alice and Miguel will teach together the next year so children have the opportunity to receive support in both their home language and in English. In the meantime, Alice asks for Julia's support in continuing her professional development during the summer session. Alice spends a few hours each week observing children and other educators interacting in both English and Spanish. She observes and documents various ways, other than English-language responses, children demonstrate their learning and development. Alice communicates about her observations with her colleagues and reflects on her observations during regular meetings with Julia.

Guideline 9.2. Partner with families to support children's multilingual development.

-  **Learn from families about the child's home language development when the home language is different from the language of instruction.** When the educator does not share the family's language, they can partner with other staff, such as interpreters or an assistant educator who uses the language. Another option is to use translation technology tools to communicate with the child's family in order to understand the full picture of the child's language development.
-  **Learn about the child's language experiences at home.** Every family has unique language practices that reflect their culture and personal preferences. Discuss the family's language goals for their child and collaborate to develop a plan to align with the family's priorities. Both the [California Department of Social Services \(CDSS\) website](#) and the California Department of Education (CDE) website provide a Family Language and Interest Interview (FL&II) for preschool settings to aid in understanding children's experiences with language.
-  **Communicate with families about the importance of continuing to support their child's development in their home language.** A strong foundation in the home language strengthens family connections, supports cultural identity, and provides critical building blocks for future learning in any language. Share accessible resources that provide information and resources for families in multiple languages, such as the Head Start series of resources "[The Importance of the Home Language](#)."



-  **Foster an environment that is respectful and welcoming to children and families of all language backgrounds.** For example, when possible, send communication to families in their preferred languages. Settings also create a welcoming environment by displaying in the entryway signs or other text in multiple languages (e.g., “Hello, Families!” “¡Hola familias!” “各位家庭您好!”). For more information about creating a welcoming environment for families, see Guideline 4.1.
-  **Invite family members to participate in learning experiences.** Families might share culturally relevant stories, songs, or games or teach the group about their home language and culture. In addition, an educator might ask families to share key vocabulary words related to a unit the group is learning (such as words for *caterpillar*, *butterfly*, and *chrysalis*) to support the children’s connections to their home languages and engagement with the learning experience.

Guideline 9.3. Provide additional support for children’s English language development and full participation in learning experiences when English is the language of instruction.

-  **Select and implement a curriculum that incorporates, values, and affirms children’s home and community cultures, including their language backgrounds.** Culturally responsive and affirming curricula recognize and highlight the strengths, abilities, and interests children develop within the culture of their families and communities.
-  **Create an environment that welcomes and supports children’s translanguaging.** High-quality preschool settings model a welcoming and flexible language environment. Children are encouraged to communicate using the language or languages that are most effective for them. Educators, when possible, support children’s understanding through the use of both the home language and English. For example, in a school-based setting where English is the language of instruction, an educator can, at times, intentionally engage children who share the same home language in small-group learning experiences, encouraging the children to use their languages in a way that best supports their learning.
-  **Support children in transferring their knowledge from their home language to English.** Children enter their early learning and care setting with rich knowledge and skills in their home language, many of which they can apply to English with guidance from educators. For example, a child who understands book-handling behaviors and print conventions in their home language, such as turning pages and recognizing a book’s title in Arabic-language books, can apply this knowledge to English-language books. Educators can also point out cognates, or similar words between two languages, to reinforce the child’s learning in all domains. A child who knows the word for the shape of a *triángulo* in Spanish, for example, can transfer their knowledge to understand the English word *triangle* with support from educators.

- ✿ **Use clear, interactive communication strategies with additional supports to facilitate children's English language development.** Speak clearly and use gestures, actions, visual aids, or real-life objects for additional support when communicating with the child in English. Repeat key words and sentences frequently, and ensure that children are given enough time to process and respond to the questions, directions, and explanations they experience.

Key Consideration

Supporting Children's Continuing Development in More Than One Language When They May Have a Disability or Developmental Delay

All children have the ability to develop in more than one language. Learning two or more languages does not cause children to develop a communication or language delay or disability or amplify an existing delay or disability (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Cheatham & Lim, 2020; Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Lund et al., 2017). All multilingual learners benefit when they are supported to develop each of their languages and to use all of their languages to learn in an integrated way (Cheatham & Lim, 2020). Each language is an additional tool for children to use to understand and communicate.

Multilingual learners who have communication or language disabilities or developmental delays may face increased difficulties developing and maintaining their home language if they are not given additional support (Chen & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013). Therefore, it is critically important that educators communicate with families about supporting the child's development in their home language when the child primarily experiences English in their preschool setting.

For more information on providing appropriate supports for multilingual learners with disabilities or developmental delays, see Guideline 8.6.

Guideline 9.4. Use appropriate assessment tools and practices for multilingual learners.

-  **Partner with families of multilingual learners throughout each step of the assessment process.** Communicate with family members to understand the child's home language environment and the skills and knowledge the child demonstrates at home and in the preschool setting. When an educator has concerns about a child's development, they share the concerns with the child's family and determine next steps together. Settings also provide resources, screening and assessment information, forms, and any interpretation of screenings or assessment results in the family's language. For more information on partnering with families about the assessment process, see Guideline 10.5.
-  **Consider multiple sources of information as part of ongoing, authentic assessment of multilingual learners' development.** Regularly observe and document evidence of each child's development in all domains of learning while the child engages in play or other activities. When assessing children, including multilingual learners, consider the various ways children demonstrate their knowledge. They may, for example, communicate in their home language, in English, or in a mix of languages; communicate with body language or gestures; demonstrate knowledge of concepts through their play; or express their knowledge through art, among many other ways. For more information about ongoing, authentic assessment, see Guideline 10.2.
-  **Use assessment tools, including developmental screenings, that are valid for use with multilingual learners.** Because multilingual learners develop on a different trajectory than children who are learning only one language, it is important to use an assessment that has included multilingual children in its development process. In addition, multilingual learners should be assessed in the language or languages in which they are able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. The Desired Results Developmental Profile (CDSS & CDE, 2025) provides guidance on observing and documenting children's knowledge and skills in any of the languages they are developing. When necessary, collaborate with specialized service providers who can interpret information from a child's screening and develop a plan to best support an individual child's development that takes into consideration all the languages they are developing. This may include partnering with the family to request a referral for further evaluation. For more information about using developmental screenings, see Guideline 10.3.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS Dual Language Learners Professional Development, <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/child-care-and-nutrition/specialized-programs/child-development/resources/dual-language-learners-professional-development-child-development>
- » CDSS Identifying and Supporting Dual Language Learners in Child Care, <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-and-development/dual-language-learners>
- » CDE Dual Language Learner (DLL) Guidance and Preschool Language Information System (PLIS) FAQs, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/dllfaqs.asp>
- » CDE Dual Language Learner (DLL) Support, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/dllsupport.asp>
- » CDE Family Language and Interest Interview, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/csppdlltools.asp>
- » CDE Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/documents/mleleducation.pdf>
- » Head Start: The Importance of the Home Language, <https://headstart.gov/culture-language/article/importance-home-language-series>
- » Multilingual Learning Toolkit, <https://www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org/>
- » Personalized Oral Language Learning (POLL) Strategies, <https://www.pollstrategies.org/>

Guideline Area 10: Assessing Children's Learning and Development

Assessment is the process of obtaining information about various areas of children's learning and development. Ongoing assessment helps educators and families understand children's progress and helps inform curriculum planning. Regularly assessing children's skills and knowledge enables educators to plan learning experiences to support each child based on their current development, strengths, and needs. Other types of assessments, such as **developmental screenings**, are designed to more specifically identify children who may have disabilities, developmental delays, or health conditions. For example, developmental screenings to assess a child's hearing, vision, and speech help determine whether the child needs further evaluation.

Authentic, ongoing observation and documentation of children's behaviors and learning is one of the most useful forms of assessment in early learning and care settings. Observational assessments occur daily as educators interact with children and document the children's learning and development. Educators observe children during play and other activities and collect and study children's work samples, such as art or early writing samples (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], n.d.-a; Peterson & Elam, 2020). To the extent possible, assessments should be conducted in different areas of the learning setting, using any language and communication style in which the child can demonstrate the full extent of their knowledge and skills, as part of experiences where the child is engaged in culturally relevant activities.

Daily observational assessments can be planned or unplanned (Gronlund & James, 2025; Peterson & Elam, 2020). For example, an educator might observe a child playing with a friend and document the specific ways the child demonstrates persistence or problem-solving skills. At another time, the

educator might assess children's understanding of a concept the group has explored for some time, such as cause and effect. The educator might plan an activity and ask purposeful questions to assess the children's understanding while observing and documenting their actions during the activity.



While observations can be conducted as part of an ongoing process, they can also be used in combination with an assessment tool or instrument. For example, to complete the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), an observation-based assessment in California, educators use information from observations during play and routines, along with anecdotal notes and work samples, as sources of information about the child's developmental progress (California Department of Social Services [CDSS] & California Department of Education [CDE], 2025).

Families play an important role in the assessment process (Head Start, 2024; NAEYC, n.d.-a). When educators communicate with families to understand the knowledge and behaviors that children demonstrate at home, they will have a better picture of the child's development, since children's behaviors may vary between the home and the early learning and care setting. Input from families can also help educators interpret assessment findings.

A list of guidelines included in Guideline Area 10 is provided below.

Guideline Area 10:

Assessing Children's Learning and Development

- **Guideline 10.1.** Establish policies and procedures that support high-quality, ongoing assessment of all children.
- **Guideline 10.2.** Engage in authentic, ongoing observational assessment to document each child's learning and development.
- **Guideline 10.3.** Use developmental screenings with all young children and collaborate with families in the referral process.
- **Guideline 10.4.** Use observation and assessment findings to inform the planning and implementation of learning experiences.
- **Guideline 10.5.** Communicate with families about observations and assessments and provide opportunities for families to contribute to the assessment process.

Guideline 10.1. Establish policies and procedures that support high-quality, ongoing assessment of all children.

-  **Develop clear written policies and procedures around observation, assessment, and screening, and share these policies with other educators in the setting.** Procedures include guidance on different types of assessment. They also include information on the frequency with which educators reflect on findings from their observations and documentation, schedules for developmental screenings, and schedules and procedures for communicating with families about assessment results.
-  **Use child assessments that are evidence-based, reliable, valid, and culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate.** For example, assessments measuring children’s language development should be designed for use with both monolingual and multilingual children to provide an accurate picture of development. When selecting standardized assessments, refer to any introductory or supplementary materials for information on their evidence basis and on the populations of children that participated in the assessment’s development and for statements on the assessment’s reliability and validity. The supplementary materials may also provide information on how individuals are trained to administer the tool and interpret the results. If the assessment was recommended by other individuals—for example, another center director or a resource and referral (R&R) agency—it may be helpful to ask for their perspective on the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of the assessment.
-  **Share information on various types of assessments and ensure that educators understand how and when to use each type.** Support educators’ understanding of the importance of consistently engaging in ongoing observational assessment during daily interactions and routines to inform planning for learning and development, a process that is known as formative assessment. Similarly, support educators’ understanding of how and when specific standardized assessment instruments, including developmental screenings, are used and who uses them.

 Arrange for educators to receive sufficient professional development to conduct assessments that are responsive to children’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Having an awareness of the cultures of the families who attend the early learning and care setting supports appropriate assessment of children. In addition, observing children in a variety of areas and activities will provide more information in cases where the educator might be unaware of a family’s cultural practice. Home visits, when possible, can provide opportunities for educators to observe children in their home environments, which informs the assessment process.

 Engage in opportunities for professional development and self-reflection that supports educators’ awareness of their own biases and assumptions in interpreting assessment results.

Children exhibit skills and knowledge in a variety of ways based on their individual strengths and needs, family priorities, family cultures, and home languages. Understanding these factors, and the expectations and learning goals each family has for their child, can help educators minimize bias and assumption when interpreting assessment findings. See Guidelines 3.3 and 3.4 for more information on reflective practice and professional development.

Guideline 10.2. Engage in authentic, ongoing observational assessment to document each child's learning and development.

- ✿ **Engage in regular, ongoing observation of each child, and study work samples the child has produced to interpret the child's learning and development.** Observe and document the child's learning and development during play and other interactions, in a variety of times when the child is engaged in adult-led activities, interactions with peers, and independent exploration.
- ✿ **Document observations for further study and interpretation.** Documentation can include short notes, anecdotes about moments in the child's day, photos, videos, or pieces of work (such as visual art or writing) that the child has produced. Ensure that educators maintain a system, such as a digital or manual portfolio, to document children's learning and development over time.
- ✿ **Conduct assessments as part of children's everyday experiences with people who are familiar to the child.** When children participate in familiar experiences as part of their everyday environments, they feel comfortable and are better able to engage in their natural behavior, enabling educators to accurately observe their skills and knowledge.



- 
Assess multilingual learners in the language or languages in which they are able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Doing so enables educators to have a more accurate understanding of the child’s knowledge and skills in all domains, including the child’s language development. When necessary, educators may partner with another staff member or individual who shares the child’s language.

- 
Assess children’s knowledge and skills in all domains of learning. In addition, ensure that a child’s skills and knowledge in one domain do not influence an educator’s assessment of the child’s skills and knowledge in other domains. For example, a child may not yet communicate in spoken words, but may demonstrate skills and knowledge in mathematics, science, or social and emotional development in other ways. See the DRDP for domains of learning and development, including examples illustrating various ways children can demonstrate their knowledge in each domain. The [Desired Results Access Project](#) website offers ideas for DRDP adaptations, including visual supports for children with low vision.

- 
Communicate regularly with family members to learn about the child’s experiences in their home. When educators understand the child’s home environment—such as the activities, songs, or games the child enjoys at home or the languages the family uses at home—they are better prepared to create an early learning and care setting that is natural and comfortable for the child. When the child is in an environment that feels comfortable and engages with activities or materials that interest them, they are more likely to demonstrate the full range of their skills and knowledge.

- 
Arrange time for planned assessment in addition to ongoing spontaneous observation and assessment. Planned assessments enable educators to focus on specific skills or behaviors that they were not able to observe through spontaneous observations in order to form a more complete picture of a child’s development. For example, after observing a child during daily interactions and learning experiences, an educator might recognize that they have not yet been able to assess a child’s understanding of principles of addition and subtraction. In response, the educator might plan an activity the next day involving collecting sticks that would enable them to purposefully observe and assess the child’s understanding of adding and taking away objects.



In-Practice Example: Assessing Learning and Development Through Ongoing Observation and Communication With Family

Ms. Judith operates a family child care home with her assistant, Miss Linda. Their child care home uses both Cantonese and English as the languages of instruction. For the last week, they have been reading an English-language book about emotions and discussing emotions throughout the day in both Cantonese and English. One child, June, is very quiet and does not usually participate in large-group discussions. During their reflective planning time, Ms. Judith and Miss Linda note that they do not have a clear picture of June's understanding. They plan to assess June's understanding by engaging her in one-on-one conversation and by asking her family.

The next day, Miss Linda sits with June during a quiet time after the group has read together. She engages June in a conversation, following her lead by responding in Cantonese when June speaks to her in Cantonese. Miss Linda asks her questions related to the emotion vocabulary the group has been learning. Ms. Judith usually tries to set aside several minutes at drop-off or pickup time to share an experience that happened during the day. Between observing her daily interactions, speaking with her one-on-one, and checking in with her family, Ms. Judith and Miss Linda form a clearer picture of June's understanding and plan ways to engage with her to make sure they are supporting her learning and development.

Guideline 10.3. Use developmental screenings with all young children and collaborate with families in the referral process.

-  **Communicate to educators and families that developmental screenings are a valuable step in assessing the child's development.** Developmental screenings are designed to more specifically identify children who may have disabilities, developmental delays, or health conditions. Sharing information on developmental screenings during tours of the setting and including it in the family handbook are useful ways of communicating with families. If a developmental screening identifies a concern related to a child's development, collaborate with the child's family in recommending a referral for a comprehensive assessment.
-  **Develop policies that outline the steps following a developmental screening.** Policies include guidance on reviewing results with other relevant staff members, sharing and discussing results with families, and recommending further evaluation if necessary.
-  **Partner with families as an essential step in the screening process.** Developmental screenings by themselves are only a first step in the process of identifying potential disabilities and developmental delays. Input from family members and educators who are close to the child is another essential source of information. In fact, many screenings are designed to be completed by a member of the child's family. Even when this is not the case, collaboration with families is essential for learning about how a child engages with other people, learning about their home environment, and learning about any factors—such as current health concerns or family stress—that might impact the results of the child's screening. Collaboration with families is also essential when it is necessary to make a referral for a comprehensive developmental assessment.

- ✿ **For screening tools that are not designed to be completed by families, collaborate with qualified service providers to administer and interpret developmental screenings.** For example, when a child is a multilingual learner, the child should be assessed by a qualified assessor who can provide the screening in the child's home language or any language in which the child can best demonstrate their skills and knowledge. In addition, pay specific attention to preferred language varieties when choosing an assessor.

Key Consideration

Partnering With Families in the Referral Process

Educators frequently play an important part in the process of early identification and intervention services. At times, following a developmental screening or ongoing observations, an educator may become concerned about aspects of a child's development. In these cases, educators are recommended to connect with the child's family to collaborate in making a referral for a comprehensive developmental assessment. Therefore, building strong, trusting relationships with families is an essential component of fully understanding each child's development and how to best support the child and family.

Guideline 10.4. Use observation and assessment findings to inform the planning and implementation of learning experiences.

Study observations and other assessments to plan and implement future learning experiences that will support children's continued learning and development.

Educators consider input from families when interpreting their own observations of the child's development. For more information on observing, documenting, and reflecting on children's development as part of curriculum planning, see Guideline 7.5.

Establish regular processes and schedules to ensure that educators have a time to reflect on observations. For example, set time weekly for individual and collaborative reflection as an integral part of curriculum planning.

Consider differences in cultural and language backgrounds, possible disabilities or developmental delays a child may have, and children's varying temperament tendencies when interpreting any assessments. For example, cultures differ in their expectations around making eye contact during interactions and whether children generally initiate interactions with adults. An educator may observe that a child in their care does not usually make eye contact or initiate interactions. Communicating with the child's family would support the educator in understanding whether the child is interacting in a way that is expected in their family and community or whether the child's interactions suggest a concern about their development.

Guideline 10.5. Communicate with families about observations and assessments and provide opportunities for families to contribute to the assessment process.

-  **Communicate assessment policies and procedures to families.** Share information about any developmental screenings that are conducted, including how frequently they are conducted. Explain how educators observe and document children's skills and knowledge and the purpose of documentation.
-  **Learn about families' own observations of children's development.** Children may demonstrate their skills and knowledge through different behaviors at home and in the early learning and care setting. Understanding the skills and knowledge a child demonstrates at home will give educators a more complete picture of the child's development.
-  **Maintain regular communication with families to share observations about the child's development as part of an ongoing respectful partnership between the family and the early learning and care setting.** When sharing observations with families, provide concrete examples of the child's actions and behaviors. For example, when discussing a child's developing ability to manage impulsive behaviors, an educator might share a recent example of a time they observed the child wait for a friend to finish talking before asking their own question. Refer to the documentation system, such as the portfolio of the child's work over time, when communicating with families about their child's learning and development, celebrating the child's growth and identifying areas of support.



Establish procedures to share the results of developmental screenings with family members.

Procedures include arranging for sufficient training for educators to understand when further evaluation or referrals are recommended following screenings. In settings with multiple staff members, procedures outline which staff members—such as educators, education specialists, and leadership—are responsible for discussing recommendations with families. Procedures also identify a location where discussions can take place. Maintaining clear, thoughtful communication with families following screenings will allow for the best possible understanding of the child’s development and ways to support the child and family.

To learn more, consult:

- » CDSS California Making Access Possible, <https://cainclusion.org/camap/counties/>
- » CDSS Desired Results for Children and Families, <https://www.desiredresults.us/>
- » CDE Desired Results Access Project, <https://www.draccess.org/>
- » Ages & Stages Questionnaires, <https://agesandstages.com/>
- » U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Learn the Signs. Act Early., <https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/index.html>

References



- Adams, R. (2025). *Rightful presence and inclusive early education programs as the first consideration for children with disabilities*.
<https://earlystartneighborhood.org/rightful-presence-and-inclusive-early-education-programs-as-the-first-consideration-for-children-with-disabilities/>
- Administration for Children & Families. (n.d.). *What is historical trauma?*
<https://acf.gov/trauma-toolkit/historical-trauma-concept>
- Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq. (1990).
<https://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.htm>
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/>
- Ansari, A., & Gershoff, E. (2016). Parent involvement in Head Start and children's development: Indirect effects through parenting. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(2), 562–579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12266>
- Atha, V. (2025). Early childhood education and social change: A literature review. *Discover Education*, 4(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-025-00832-9>
- Barnett, W. S., & Espinosa, L. M. (2025). *How to choose a preschool curriculum*. [Policy brief]. <https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/NIEER%20How%20to%20Choose%20a%20Curriculum%20Brief5%20%282%29.pdf>
- Bartlett, J. D. (2021). Trauma-informed practices in early childhood education. *ZERO TO THREE Journal*, 41(3), 24–34. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/journal/trauma-informed-practices-in-early-childhood-education/>
- Barton, E. E., Smith, B. J., & Locchetta, B. M. (2025). *The preschool inclusion toolbox: How to build and lead a high-quality program* (2nd ed.). Brookes Publishing.
- Bernard, D. M. (2024). Understanding socioculturalism in early childhood education: Current perspectives and emerging trends. *Interactions*, 73, 16–31.
<https://doi.org/10.7176/JCSD/73-03>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32, 513–553.
- Brown, J. L., Jennings, P. A., Rasheed, D., Doyle, S., Cham, H., & Frank, J. L. (2023). Direct and moderating impacts of the CARE mindfulness-based professional learning program for teachers on children's academic and social-emotional outcomes. *Applied Developmental Science*, 29(1), 14–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2023.2268327>

- Buettner, C. K., Jeon, L., Hur, E., & Garcia, R. E. (2016). Teachers' social-emotional capacity: Factors associated with teachers' responsiveness and professional commitment. *Early Education and Development*, 27(7), 1018–1039. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1168227>
- BUILD Initiative. (2023). *Child welfare and early childhood: Cross-system collaboration to improve outcomes for young children and their families*. https://buildinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Report-Webinar-Summary_Final-Child-Welfare.pdf
- Burchinal, M., Garber, K., Foster, T., Bratsch-Hines, M., Franco, X., & Peisner-Feinberg, E. (2021). Relating early care and education quality to preschool outcomes: The same or different models for different outcomes? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 55, 35–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2020.10.005>
- Byers-Heinlein, K., & Lew-Williams, C. (2013). Bilingualism in the early years: What the science says. *LEARNING Landscapes*, 7(1), 95. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6168212/>
- CA Teaching Pyramid. (n.d.). Classroom materials. <https://cainclusion.org/teachingpyramid/materials-classroom/>
- California Department of Education. (2019a). *Infant/toddler learning and development program guidelines*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/itguidelines2nded2019.pdf>
- California Department of Education. (2019b). *Responsive early education for young children and families experiencing homelessness*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/earlyedhomelessness2020.pdf>
- California Department of Education. (2020). *Improving education for multilingual and English learner students: Research to practice*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/documents/mleleducation.pdf>
- California Department of Education. (2021). *The powerful role of play in early education*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/powerfulroleofplay.pdf>
- California Department of Education. (2022). *Creating equitable early learning environments for young boys of color: Disrupting disproportionate outcomes*. <https://edpreplab.org/resource-library/creating-equitable-early-learning-environments-young-boys-color>
- California Department of Education. (2024). *California preschool/transitional kindergarten learning foundations*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>
- California Department of Education. (2026). *Preschool through third grade (P–3) learning progressions*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/p3/>

California Department of Social Services. (2025a). *California framework for infant–toddler learning and development*.

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-and-development/publications/california-framework-for-infant-toddler-learning-and-development>

California Department of Social Services. (2025b). *California infant–toddler learning and development foundations* (2nd ed.).

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CCDD/Publications/itldf-ada-en.pdf>

California Department of Social Services & California Department of Education. (2025).

Desired results developmental profile. [https://www.desiredresults.us/sites/default/files/docs/drdp%202025/DRDP%20\(2025\)%20PTK%20View_ADA.pdf](https://www.desiredresults.us/sites/default/files/docs/drdp%202025/DRDP%20(2025)%20PTK%20View_ADA.pdf)

California Early Childhood Online. (n.d.). *Culturally responsive trauma-informed practices*.

<https://caearlychildhoodonline.org>

Cankaya, O., Rohatyn-Martin, N., Leach, J., Taylor, K., & Bulut, O. (2023). Preschool children’s loose parts play and the relationship to cognitive development: A review of the literature. *Journal of Intelligence*, 11(8), 151. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence11080151>

CAST. (2026). *Universal Design for Learning*.

<https://www.cast.org/what-we-do/universal-design-for-learning/>

Castro, D. C., & Prishker, N. (2019). Early childhood care and education for bilingual children and the road to multilingualism. In C. Brown & M. B. McMullen (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood care and education* (pp. 173–195). Wiley Blackwell Publishing.

Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2019). *Measuring the impact of local early childhood systems: Outcomes, indicators, and system performance*.

<https://cssp.org/resource/measuring-the-impact-of-local-early-childhood-systems-outcomes-indicators-and-system-performance/>

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2021). *Three principles to improve outcomes for children and families*. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

Cheatham, G. A., & Lim, S. (2020). Disabilities and home language maintenance: Myths, models of disability, and equity. In A. C. Schalley & S. A. Eisenclas (Eds.), *Handbook of home language maintenance and development: Social and affective factors* (pp. 401–424). De Gruyter.

- Chen, D., & Gutiérrez-Clellen, V. (2013). Early intervention and young dual language learners with special needs. In *California's best practices for young dual language learners: Research overview papers* (pp. 209–230). Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/dllresearchpapers.pdf>
- Clayback, K. A., Partee, A. M., Williford, A. P., Downer, J. T., Parker, K., & Lhospital, A. S. (2025). Using data to promote inclusion through early childhood mental health consultation. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1494378. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1494378>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (n.d.). *What is the CASEL framework?* <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#responsible>
- Collado, C. L., Urbani, J. M., & Monroe-Speed, C. (2025). The equity pause process: Creating equitable learning spaces with colleagues. *Young Exceptional Children*, 28(3), 143–155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10962506251353532>
- Council on Communications and Media. (2016). Media and young minds. *Pediatrics*, 138(5), e20162591. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2591>
- Cumming, T. (2017). Early childhood educators' well-being: An updated review of the literature. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45, 583–593. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-016-0818-6>
- Curenton, S. M., Iruka, I. U., Sims, J., & Ibekwe-Okafor, N. (2024). Advancing developmental science on the impact of racism in the early years. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 69(Supplement), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2024.06.001>
- Davis Schoch, A., Simons Gerson, C., Halle, T., & Bredeson, M. (2023). *Children's learning and development benefits from high-quality early care and education: A summary of the evidence* (OPRE Report #2023-226). <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/%232023-226%20Benefits%20from%20ECE%20Highlight%20508.pdf>
- Derman-Sparks, L., Edwards, J. O., & Goins, C. M. (2020). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves*. NAEYC.
- Division for Early Childhood. (2014). *DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education 2014*. <http://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices>

- Division for Early Childhood & National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/ps_inclusion_dec_naeyc_ec.pdf
- Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Mahoney, J. L. (2025). *Handbook of social and emotional learning* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center & National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (2023). *Indicators of high-quality inclusion*. <https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/indicators.asp>
- Erdman, S., Colker, L. J., & Winter, E. C. (2020). *Trauma and young children: Teaching strategies to support and empower*. NAEYC.
- Farran, D. C. (2017). Characteristics of pre-kindergarten programs that drive positive outcomes. In D. Phillips, M. W. Lipsey, K. A. Dodge, D. Bassok, M. R. Burchinal, G. J. Duncan, M. Dynarski, K. A. Magnuson, & C. Weiland (Eds.), *The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects* (pp. 45–49). Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/duke_prekstudy_final_4-4-17_hires.pdf
- Frost, R. L., & Goldberg, A. E. (2019). The ABCs of diversity and inclusion: Developing an inclusive environment for diverse families in early childhood education. *ZERO TO THREE Journal*, 39(3), 36–41. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/journal/the-abcs-of-diversity-and-inclusion-developing-an-inclusive-environment-for-diverse-families-in-early-childhood-education/>
- Futterer, J. N., Bulotsky-Shearer, R. J., De Angelis, L., Ullery, M. A., Pena, A., Bayuk, J., & Jacko, V. (2023). Associations between peer play interactions and empathy within an early childhood inclusion program for children with visual impairment. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 51(5), 889–898. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01344-z>
- Garro, A., Giordano, K., Gubi, A., & Shortway, K. (2021). A consultation approach to target exclusionary discipline of students of color in early childhood education. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 25(1), 124–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-019-00258-9>
- Gaspar, C. R., & Sahay, D. (2025). Expanding the concept of parent involvement to special education: Considerations for inclusivity. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 17(3), 423–445. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12634>

- Gordon, D. (Ed.). (2024). *Universal design for learning: Principles, frameworks, and practice*. Center for Applied Special Technology.
- Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care. (2013). *California's best practices for young dual language learners: Research overview papers*.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/dllresearchpapers.pdf>
- Graves, K. A., McCree, N., Green, A., Thompson, J., Schott, E., Pai, D. V., Smith, D., & Dorsey, B. (2026). A framework for early childhood administrators to support equitable practices. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 54, 2403–2412.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-025-02005-7>
- Gronlund, G., & James, M. (2025). *Focused observations: How to observe young children for assessment and curriculum planning*. Redleaf Press.
- Habben, K., & Kim, V. (2025). *A data profile of young dual language learners in California and implications for early childhood programs*. Migration Policy Institute.
https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-nciip-dll-fact-sheet-ca-2025_final.pdf
- Hancock, C. L., & Carter, D. R. (2016). Preschool: Building environments that encourage positive behavior: The Preschool Behavior Support Self-Assessment. *YC Young Children*, 71(1), 66–73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/ycyoungchildren.71.1.66>
- Hassinger-Das, B., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2017). The case of brain science and guided play: A developing story. *Young Child*, 72(2).
<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2017/case-brain-science-guided-play>
- Head Start. (2021). *Co-creating strong bonds*. <https://headstart.gov/family-engagement/staff-parent-relationships-honor-support-parenting/co-creating-strong-bonds>
- Head Start. (2024, September 17). *Child screenings and assessments*.
<https://headstart.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-33-child-screenings-assessments>
- Head Start. (2025). *Reflective strategies: Sustaining effective practices*.
<https://headstart.gov/family-engagement/building-partnerships-guide-developing-relationships-families/reflective-strategies-sustaining-effective-practice>
- Herman, A. N., & Whitaker, R. C. (2020). Reconciling mixed messages from mixed methods: A randomized trial of a professional development course to increase trauma-informed care. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 101, 104349. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104349>

Hubel, G. S., Davies, F., Goodrum, N. M., Schmarder, K. M., Schnake, K., & Moreland, A. D. (2020, April). Adverse childhood experiences among early care and education teachers: Prevalence and associations with observed quality of classroom social and emotional climate. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 111, 104877.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104877>

Huffhines, L., Herman, R., Silver, R. B., Low, C. M., Newland, R., & Parade, S. H. (2023). Reflective supervision and consultation and its impact within early childhood-serving programs: A systematic review. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 44(6), 803–836.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.22079>

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. (2004).

<https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/individuals-disabilities-education-act-idea>

Institute of Medicine & National Research Council. (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*. National Academies Press.

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/19401/chapter/1>

Jenkins, J. M., & Duncan, G. J. (2017). Do prekindergarten curricula matter? In D. Phillips, M. W. Lipsey, K. A. Dodge, D. Bassok, M. R. Burchinal, G. J. Duncan, M. Dynarski, K. A. Magnuson, & C. Weiland (Eds.), *The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects* (pp. 37–44). Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/duke_prekstudy_final_4-4-17_hires.pdf

Jennings, P. A., Brown, J. L., Frank, J. L., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Davis, R., Rasheed, D., DeWeese, A., DeMauro, A. A., Cham, H., & Greenberg, M. T. (2017). Impacts of the CARE for Teachers program on teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(7), 1010–1028.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000187>

Jennings, P. A., Jeon, L., & Roberts, A. M. (2020). Introduction to the special issue on early care and education professionals' social and emotional well-being. *Early Education and Development*, 31(7), 933–939. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2020.1809895>

Jeon, L., & Wells, M. B. (2018). An organizational-level analysis of early childhood teachers' job attitudes: Workplace satisfaction affects early Head Start and Head Start teacher turnover. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 47(4), 563–581.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-018-9444-3>

- Johns, S., Solis, L., Zur, O., Hill-Maini, T., Yanchik, A., & Vasquez-Chilín, E. (2024). *Inclusive early education expansion program evaluation*. WestEd. <https://www.wested.org/resource/inclusive-early-education-expansion-program-evaluation/>
- Karabon, A. (2021). Examining how early childhood preservice teacher funds of knowledge shapes pedagogical decision making. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 106, 103449. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103449>
- Kay-Raining Bird, E., Genesee, F., & Verhoeven, L. (2016). Bilingualism in children with developmental disorders: A narrative review. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 63, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcomdis.2016.07.003>
- Koepp, A. E., Gershoff, E. T., Castelli, D. M., & Bryan, A. E. (2022). Preschoolers' executive functions following indoor and outdoor free play. *Trends in Neuroscience and Education*, 28, 100182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tine.2022.100182>
- Koralek, D., Nemeth, K. N., & Ramsey, K. (2019). *Families and educators together: Building great relationships that support young children*. NAEYC.
- Kurtz, J. (2023). *Supporting young children to cope, build resilience, and heal from trauma through play: A practical guide for early childhood educators*. Routledge.
- Lang, S. N., Jeon, L., Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., & Wells, M. B. (2020). Associations between parent–teacher co-caring relationships, parent–child relationships, and young children's social emotional development. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 49(4), 623–646. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-020-09545-6>
- Lang, S. N., Jeon, S., & Tebben, E. (2024). Relationships between families and Head Start staff: Associations with children's academic outcomes through home involvement and approaches to learning. *Early Education and Development*, 35(3), 413–430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2022.2155772>
- Lang, S. N., Tebben, E., Luckey, S. W., Hurns, K. M., Fox, E. G., Ford, D. Y., Ansari, A., & Pasque, P. A. (2024). Early childhood teachers' dispositions, knowledge, and skills related to diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 67, 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2023.12.005>

- Lawrence, S., Smith, S., & Banerjee, R. (2016). *Preschool inclusion: Key findings from research and implications for policy*. Child Care and Early Education Research Connections, National Center for Children in Poverty. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579178.pdf>
- Lohmann, M. J., Hovey, K. A., Gauvreau, A. N., & Higgins, J. P. (2019). Using assistive technology tools to support learning in the inclusive preschool classroom. *The Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.58729/2167-3454.1090>
- Lund, E. M., Kohlmeier, T. L., & Durán, L. K. (2017). Comparative language development in bilingual and monolingual children with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 39(2), 106–124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053815117690871>
- Maier, M., Hsueh, J., Somers, M., & Burchinal, M. (2022). *Does classroom quality promote preschoolers' learning? A conceptual framework for evaluating the impact of classroom quality on child outcomes* (OPRE Report No. 2022-159). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/does-classroom-quality-promote-preschoolers-learning-conceptual-framework-evaluating>
- Mathis, E., Hartz, K., Berkowitz, M., Carlson, A., Kimport, R., Brown, C., Biel, M. G., & Domitrovich, C. E. (2025). Infant and early childhood mental health consultation: Evaluating change in classroom climate and teaching practices by dosage of program exposure. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 70, 52–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2024.08.009>
- McLeskey, J., Barringer, M-D., Billingsley, B., Brownell, M., Jackson, D., Kennedy, M., Lewis, T., Maheady, L., Rodriguez, J., Scheeler, M. C., Winn, J., & Ziegler, D. (2017). *High-leverage practices in special education*. Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. <https://systemimprovement.org/uploads/files/CEC-HLP-Web.pdf>
- Minkoff, A. C. (2020). Exploring intergroup dialogue as a sociocritical pedagogy in preservice early childhood education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 47(3), 55–74. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26977515>
- Multilingual Learning Toolkit. (2026). *Homepage*. <https://www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org/>
- Narea, M., Treviño, E., Caqueo-Úrizar, A., Miranda, C., & Gutiérrez-Rioseco, J. (2022). Understanding the relationship between preschool teachers' well-being, interaction quality, and students' well-being. *Child Indicators Research*, 15, 533–551. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-021-09876-3>

- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures*. National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24677>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2024). *A new vision for high-quality preschool curriculum*. National Academies Press. <https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/27429>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2025). *Early relational health: Building foundations for child, family, and community well-being*. National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/29234>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (n.d.-a). *DAP: Observing, documenting, and assessing children's development and learning*. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/dap/assessing-development>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (n.d.-b). *Principles of effective family engagement*. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement/principles>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019). *Advancing equity in early childhood education*. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2020). *Developmentally appropriate practice*. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/dap-statement_0.pdf
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2025a). *Code of ethics for early childhood educators*. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/code-of-ethics>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2025b). *Early childhood program standards*. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/2025_early_childhood_program_standards.pdf
- National Association for the Education of Young Children & the Fred Rogers Center. (2023). *Technology and interactive media as tools in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/ps_technology.pdf
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention. (2019). *Essentials for childhood: Creating safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments for all children*. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/117721>

- National Center on Disability and Journalism. (2021). *Disability language style guide*. Arizona State University. <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/#disabledpeople>
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2020). *Connecting the brain to the rest of the body: Early childhood development and lifelong health are deeply entwined* (Working Paper 15). http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/wp15_health_FINALv2.pdf
- Nguyen, T., Ansari, A., Pianta, R. C., Whittaker, J. V., Vitiello, V. E., & Ruzek, E. (2020). The classroom relational environment and children’s early development in preschool. *Social Development*, 29(4), 1071–1091. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12447>
- Nicholson, J., Perez, L., Kurtz, J., Bryant, S., & Giles, D. (2023). *Trauma-informed practices for early childhood educators: Relationship-based approaches that reduce stress, build resilience, and support healing in young children* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003302575>
- Pacchiano, D. M., Wagner, M. R., & Lewandowski, H. (2019). Organizing early education for improvement: Voices from the field on essential supports. *YC Young Children*, 74(4), 24–33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26783373>
- Panjeti-Madan, V. N., & Ranganathan, P. (2023). Impact of screen time on children’s development: Cognitive, language, physical, and social and emotional domains. *Multimodal Technologies and Interaction*, 7(5), 52.
- Peterson, G., & Elam, E. (2020). *Observation and assessment in early childhood education*. California Community Colleges, Chancellor’s Office. <https://childdevelopment.org/docs/default-source/pdfs/observation-and-assessment-english2-8-20.pdf>
- Phillips, D. A., Lipsey, M. W., Dodge, K. A., Bassok, D., Burchinal, M. R., Duncan, G. J., Dynarski, M., Magnuson, K. A., & Weiland, C. (2017). *The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects*. Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/duke_prekstudy_final_4-4-17_hires.pdf
- Phillips, E. C., & Scrinzi, A. (2024). Successful transitions into and out of kindergarten: Supporting families and children. In E. C. Phillips & A. Scrinzi (Eds.), *Focus on developmentally appropriate practice: Equitable and joyful learning in kindergarten* (pp. 6–10). NAEYC.
- POLL Strategies. (n.d.). *Strategies index*. <https://www.pollstrategies.org/strategies-index/>

Premo, E., Pilarz, A. R., & Lin, Y. C. (2023). Pre-kindergarten teachers' family engagement practices and English language learners' attendance and early learning skills: Exploring the role of the linguistic context. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 63, 1–14.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.10.005>

Putcha, V., & Bonsu, D. (2020). *Strengthening and supporting the early childhood workforce: Continuous quality improvement*. Early Childhood Workforce Initiative.

<https://www.earlychildhoodworkforce.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Landscape-Analysis-Continuous%20Quality-Improvement.pdf>

Rad, D., Redeş, A., Roman, A., Ignat, S., Lile, R., Demeter, E., Egerău, A., Dughi, T., Balaş, E., Maier, R., Kiss, C., Torkos, H., & Rad, G. (2022). Pathways to inclusive and equitable quality early childhood education for achieving SDG4 goal: A scoping review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 955833. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.955833>

Raikes, H. H., White, L., Green, S., Burchinal, M., Kainz, K., Horm, D., Bingham, G., Cobo-Lewis, A., St. Clair, L., Greenfield, D., & Esteraich, J. (2019). Use of the home language in preschool classrooms and first- and second-language development among dual-language learners. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 47, 145–158.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.06.012>

Ramirez, F. (2003). Dismay and disappointment: Parental involvement of Latino immigrant parents. *The Urban Review*, 35(2), 93–110. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023705511946>

Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. (n.d.). *What is culturally sustaining pedagogy?* Institute of Education Sciences.

<https://ies.ed.gov/rel-pacific/2025/01/culturally-sustaining-pedagogy-infographic>

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794 et seq. (1973). <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/USCODE-2024-title29/USCODE-2024-title29-chap16-subchapV-sec794>

Sandall, S. R., Gauvreau, A. N., Joseph, G. E., & Schwartz, I. S. (2024). *Building blocks for teaching young children in inclusive settings* (4th ed.). Brookes Publishing.

Sandstrom, H., Casas, M., Hernandez-Lepe, F., & Greenberg, E. (2022). *Early educators' work experiences and job satisfaction: Findings from the District of Columbia child care policy research partnership*. Urban Institute.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Early%20Educators%E2%80%99%20Work%20Experiences%20and%20Job%20Satisfaction.pdf>

- Selman, S. B., & Dilworth-Bart, J. E. (2024). Routines and child development: A systematic review. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 16(2), 272–328.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12549>
- Silver, H. C., Schoch, A. E. D., Loomis, A. M., Park, C. E., & Zinsser, K. M. (2022). Updating the evidence: A systemic review of a decade of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) research. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 44, 5–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.22033>
- Slot, P. (2018). *Structural characteristics and process quality in early childhood education and care: A literature review* (OECD Education Working Papers, No. 176). OECD Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.1787/edaf3793-en>
- Spielberger, J., Burkhardt, T., Carrion, E. D., & Gitlow, E. R. (2024). Fostering healthy social and emotional climates in early childhood classrooms through infant and early childhood mental health consultation. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 67, 307–319.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2024.01.009>
- Steed, E. A., Rausch, A., Strain, P. S., Bold, E., & Leech, N. (2023). High-quality inclusion in preschool settings: A survey of early childhood personnel. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 43, 142–155. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/02711214211063921>
- Stone, K. J., Schnake, K., & Moreland, A. D. (2023). Adverse childhood experiences among early childhood educators and improving teacher health and well-being: Changes in teacher affect. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 65, 195–204.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2023.05.007>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2016). *Creating a healthier life: A step-by-step guide*. <https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma16-4958.pdf>
- SWIFT Education Center. (2025, May). *Rightful presence in education systems*.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED677427.pdf>
- Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Song, L., Luo, R., Kuchirko, Y., Kahana-Kalman, R., Yoshikawa, H., & Raufman, J. (2014). Children’s vocabulary growth in English and Spanish across early development and associations with school readiness skills. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 39(2), 69–87.
- Tout, K., Epstein, D., Soli, M., & Lowe, C. (2015). *A blueprint for early care and education quality improvement initiatives*. Child Trends. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/a-blueprint-for-early-care-and-education-quality-improvement-initiatives-final-report>

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. (2018). *Relationship-based competencies to support family engagement: Overview for early childhood professionals*. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ncpfce_rbc_all_508final.pdf
- U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. (2023). *Policy statement on inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs*. <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecdp/policy-statement-on-inclusion.pdf>
- Vaisarova, J., & Reynolds, A. J. (2022). Is more child-initiated always better? Exploring relations between child-initiated instruction and preschoolers' school readiness. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 34(2), 195–226. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-021-09376-6>
- Vélez-Agosto, N. M., Soto-Crespo, J. G., Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, M., Vega-Molina, S., & García Coll, C. (2017). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory revision: Moving culture from the macro into the micro. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(5), 900–910. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617704397>
- von Suchodoletz, A., Lee, D. S., Henry, J., Tamang, S., Premachandra, B., & Yoshikawa, H. (2023). Early childhood education and care quality and associations with child outcomes: A meta-analysis. *PLOS ONE*, 18(5), e0285985. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0285985>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Zone of proximal development: A new approach. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, 84–91.
- Warren, S. R., Martinez, R. S., & Sortino, L. A. (2016). Exploring the quality indicators of a successful full-inclusion preschool program. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 30(4), 540–553. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1214651>
- Weisberg, D. S., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Kittredge, A. K., & Klahr, D. (2016). Guided play: Principles and practices. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 25(3), 177–182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721416645512>
- Whitaker, R. C., Dearth-Wesley, T., & Gooze, R. A. (2015). Workplace stress and the quality of teacher-child relationships in Head Start. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 30, 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.08.008>

- Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, & Council on Communications and Media. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3), e20182058. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2058>
- Zero to Six Collaborative Group. (2010). *Early childhood trauma*. National Child Traumatic Stress Network. https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/early_childhood_trauma.pdf
- Zhu, W., Luo, X., Werneck, A. O., Pindus, D., Kramer, L., Kramer, A. F., Hillman, C. H., Herold, F., Zhang, Z., & Zou, L. (2024). Nature and success: Outdoor play is linked to school readiness. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 57, 101895. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2024.101895>
- Zinsser, K. M., Silver, H. C., Shenberger, E. R., & Jackson, V. (2022). A systematic review of early childhood exclusionary discipline. *Review of Educational Research*, 92(5), 743–785. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543211070047>
- Zosh, J. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D., Solis, S. L., & Whitebread, D. (2018). Accessing the inaccessible: Redefining play as a spectrum. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1124. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01124>
- Zulauf-McCurdy, C. A., Nazaire, O. R., Powell, T., & Iruka, I. U. (2024). Interrogating the role of anti-Blackness in the early care and education experiences of Black children and families: A call for advancing equitable science and practice. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 69(Supplement), 6–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2024.03.004>

Appendix



Additional Resources Consulted

Introduction

- Burchinal, M. (2017). Measuring early care and education quality. *Child Development Perspectives*, 12, 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12260>
- Espinosa, L. M. (2013). *PreK-3rd: Challenging common myths about dual language learners*. Foundation for Child Development. <https://www.fcd-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Challenging-Common-Myths-Update.pdf>
- Georgia Family Connection Partnership, Inc. (2024, May). *Long-term impacts of universal pre-K—understanding conflicting research* (Research Summary 11). <https://gafcp.org/2024/05/31/long-term-impacts-of-universal-pre-k-understanding-conflicting-research/>
- Saucedo, E. (2025). *Dual language learners make up half of preschoolers: What that means for California*. <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/dual-language-learners-make-up-half-of-preschoolers-what-that-means-for-california/>
- Steele, J. A., Slater, R., Zamarro, G., Miller, T., Li, J. J., Burkhauser, S., & Bacon, M. (2017). *Dual-language immersion programs raise student achievement in English*. RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9903.html
- Werblow, J., Duesbery, L., & Koulidobrova, H. (2019). The case for dual language programs as the future of public education. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies* (Special Issue #3 on Educational Leadership and Social Justice), 3(3). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1252036.pdf>

Setting the Stage for Quality

- Administration for Children and Families. (2024). *Strategies and recommendations for supporting mental health*. <https://headstart.gov/sites/default/files/im/downloads/acf-ohs-im-24-01.pdf?redirect=eclkc>
- Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America & Elijah-Alavi Foundation. (2022). *Child care policies for food allergy: Elijah's Law report for U.S. states and territories*. <https://aafa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/child-care-policies-for-food-allergy-elijahs-law-report.pdf>
- Friesen, A., & Mihai, A. (2024). Promoting EI/ECSE practitioners' professional growth through a reflective practice framework. *Young Exceptional Children*, 27(1), 16–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10962506231169326>
- Guirguis, T., & Anderson, S. (2022). *Gun violence and children: How to talk to young children about active shooter drills* (Part 3). <https://www.erikson.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-young-children-about-active-shooter-drills/>
- Head Start. (2025). *Reflective supervision*. <https://headstart.gov/family-engagement/building-partnerships-guide-developing-relationships-families/reflective-supervision>
- Jennings, P. (2014). Early childhood teachers' well-being, mindfulness, and self-compassion in relation to classroom quality and attitudes towards challenging students. *Mindfulness*, 6(4), 732–743. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0312-4>
- Johnson, A. (2019). Action research for teacher professional development. In C. A. Mertler (Ed.), *The Wiley handbook of action research in education*. John Wiley and Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119399490>
- National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. (2023). *Creating a culture of staff wellness*. <https://headstart.gov/health-services-management/learning-module/creating-culture-staff-wellness>
- Office of Child Care, Child Care Technical Assistance Center. (n.d.). *Caring for Our Children Basics home*. <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/cfoc>
- Smith, S., & Lawrence, S. (2019). *Early care and education teacher well-being: Associations with children's experience, outcomes, and workplace conditions: A research-to-policy brief*. Child Care & Early Education Research Connections. <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/d8-ngw9-n011>

Wonders, L. L. (2025). *Mindfulness-based play therapy: A transtheoretical and neurobiological approach to psychotherapy with children and families*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003468585>

ZERO TO THREE. (2016). *Three building blocks of reflective supervision for early childhood professionals*. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/three-building-blocks-of-reflective-supervision/>

ZERO TO THREE. (2017). *The basics of infant and early childhood mental health: A briefing paper*. https://www.zerotothree.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The-Basics-of-Infant-and-Early-Childhood-Mental-Health_-A-Briefing-Paper.pdf

Building Relationship-Centered Partnerships With Families and Children

- Allen, D. J., Iruka, I. U., & Musa, T. (2025). *African-centered education practice guide: Transformative, culturally responsive practices for Black children's excellence*. Equity Research Action Coalition, UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. <https://equity-coalition.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/AfricanCenteredEduPracticeGuide.pdf>
- Alverson, R., Ginn, L., & Gilbert, J. (2019). Sustaining collaborative preschool partnerships and the challenges of educating the whole child. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 13(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-019-0065-6>
- Campana, K., Martens, M., Filippi, A., & Clunis, J. (2022). A “library school:” Building a collaborative preschool-library partnership to support whole family engagement. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50(1), 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01127-4>
- Catalyst California. (2022). *Uplifting family voices: Family engagement in California's Rate Reform & Quality Initiative*. https://catalyst-ca.cdn.prismic.io/catalyst-ca/51168133-bd58-45d4-b585-fd61a0cfea31_Catalyst+California+DSS+Report+2022_14.pdf
- Committee for Children. (2014). *Scope and sequence: Early learning [Second Step program]*. <https://assets.ctfassets.net/98bcvzcrxclo/5LAkcTNKQktwFTg7AvbpNm/05c8728039dee7dc35cbdb15aa0b8d1d/el-5-scope-sequence-ss.pdf>
- CSEFEL. (2017). *Teaching pyramid PDA practice*. <https://cainclusion.org/resources/tp/webinars/20170111/Teaching-Pyramid-PDA-PDA-Plus-pptHandout.pdf>
- Esteban-Guitart, M. (2021). Advancing the funds of identity theory: A critical and unfinished dialogue. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 28(2), 169–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2021.1913751>
- Head Start. (2024). *Exploring cultural concepts: Funds of knowledge*. <https://headstart.gov/video/funds-knowledge-video>
- Head Start. (2026). *Trauma-informed care program systems*. <https://headstart.gov/mental-health/understanding-trauma-healing-adults/trauma-informed-care-program-systems>
- Johnson, A. W., & Peterson, S. (2019). Supporting individual and community identity development in infant–toddler classrooms. ZERO TO THREE. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/zero-to-three-journal/identity-and-belonging-in-early-childhood-settings/>

- Jones, J. C., Hampshire, P. K., & McDonnell, A. P. (2020). Authentically preparing early childhood special education teachers to partner with families. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(6), 767–779. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01035-7>
- Mangione, P. L., & Marcella-Burdett, J. (2023). *Infant/toddler caregiving: A guide to social–emotional growth and socialization* (3rd ed.). California Department of Social Services.
- National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. (2023). *Pyramid model practices implementation checklist*. <https://www.challengingbehavior.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Pyramid-Practices-Checklist-for-Preschool-2-5-years-Classrooms.pdf>
- Partee, A. M., Alamos, P., Williford, A. P., & Downer, J. T. (2022). Preschool children’s observed interactions with teachers: Implications for understanding teacher–child relationships. *School Mental Health*, 14(4), 967–983. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-022-09517-2>
- Partee, A. M., Lhospital, A. S., Hammond, S. A., Williford, A. P., & Downer, J. T. (2025). Supporting preschool teachers’ social–emotional competencies and “lenses” for challenging behavior in Virginia’s early childhood mental health consultation program. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy*, 5, 100096. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sel.2025.100096>
- Phillips, D. A., Johnson, A. D., Iruka, I. U. (2022). Early care and education settings as contexts for socialization: New directions for quality assessment. *Child Development Perspectives*, 16(3), 127–133. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12460>
- Quality Counts California. (2019, October). *Module 1 reference list* [PDF]. <https://www.qualitycountsca.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FE-M1-ReferenceList.pdf>
- UVA Today. (2020). How a 10-minute “reset” may make a huge difference for kids at home. <https://news.virginia.edu/content/how-10-minute-reset-may-make-huge-difference-kids-home>
- Vanderbilt University Barton Lab. (n.d.). *Teaching replacement skills* [Infographic]. <https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-web/lab-wpcontent/sites/96/2020/02/04141306/Large-Landscape-Teach-.pdf>

Supporting Children's Learning and Development

Artzi, L., Hsin, L. B., Sanford, A. K., Brown, J. E., & Guin, S. (2022). Meeting the language needs of emergent multilingual students at risk for learning disabilities through multitiered systems of support. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 37(3), 189–203.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12288>

California Department of Education. (2021). *Inclusion works! Creating child care programs that promote belonging for children with disabilities* (2nd ed.).

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/inclusionworks2ed.pdf>

California MAP. (2013). *Early identification guide*.

<https://cainclusion.org/camap/resource/early-identification-guide/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2026). *CDC's developmental milestones*.

<https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/milestones/index.html>

Cuba, M. J., & Tefera, A. A. (2024). Contextualizing multilingual learner disproportionality in special education: A mixed-methods approach. *Teachers College Record*, 126(1), 29–60.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681241233877>

Espinosa, L. M. (2015). Challenges and benefits of early bilingualism in the United States' context. *Global Education Review*, 2(1), 40–53

<https://ger.mercy.edu/index.php/ger/article/view/120>

Espinosa, L. M. (2018). Encouraging the development and achievement of dual language learners in early childhood. *American Educator*, 42(3), 10–15.

<https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2018/aefall2018.pdf>

Espinosa, L. M., LaForett, D. R., Burchinal, M., Winsler, A., Tien, H.-C., Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., & Castro, D. C. (2017). Child care experiences among dual language learners in the United States: Analyses of the early childhood longitudinal study–Birth cohort. *AERA Open*, 3(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858417699380>

First Nations Development Institute. (n.d.) *Hupa language immersion program strengthens the continuum of language and culture*. <https://www.firstnations.org/stories/hupa-language-immersion-program-strengthens-the-continuum-of-language-and-culture/>

Goodrich, J. M., Fitton, L., Chan, J., & Davis, C. J. (2023). Assessing oral language when screening multilingual children for learning disabilities in reading. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 58(3), 164–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10534512221081264>

Head Start. (n.d.). *Dual language learners program assessment*.

<https://headstart.gov/form/dll-program-assessment>

Head Start. (2024, September 6). *Management system*.

<https://headstart.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-101-management-system>

Inclusion Today. (2025). *Inclusive leadership practices: Starter kit & companion guide*.

Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education.

<https://educatingalllearners.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Starter-Kit-Inclusive-Leadership-Practices-Accessible-Version-1-6-25.pdf>

Kim, K. H., & Zabelina, D. (2015). Cultural bias in assessment: Can creativity assessment help? *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 6(2), 129–148.

<https://janeway.uncpress.org/ijcp/article/id/724/>

Leif, E., Berger, E., Allen, K. A., Fox, R., Feinberg, A., Chen, L., & Ng, A. (2025). Supporting the transition of children with developmental disabilities into their first year of schooling: A scoping review and recommendations for practice. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2025.2541231>

Luo, R., Pace, A., Levine, D., Iglesias, A., de Villiers, J., Golinkoff, R. M., Wilson, M. S., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2021). Home literacy environment and existing knowledge mediate the link between socioeconomic status and language learning skills in dual language learners. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 55, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2020.10.007>

Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. (n.d.). *Culturally sustaining teaching practices for multilingual students*. Institute of Education Science.

https://ies.ed.gov/sites/default/files/migrated/rel/ncee/rel/infographics/pdf/REL_PA_Culturally_Sustaining_Teaching_Practices_for_Multilingual_Students.pdf

Squires, J., Farrell, J., Clifford, J., Yockelson, S., Twombly, E., & Potter, L. (2020). *ASQ:3 and ASQ:SE-2 Training materials: Tips for discussing screening results with families*. Brookes Publishing.

<https://nhfv.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Tips-for-Discussing-if-Concerns-Arise.pdf>

Zheng, Z., Degotardi, S., & Djonov, E. (2021). Supporting multilingual development in early childhood education: A scoping review. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 54, 1–14.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2020.09.006>

Zheng, Z., Degotardi, S., & Djonov, E. (2024). Translanguaging practices in infant rooms: Case studies of Chinese-Australian bilingual infant-educator interactions. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 27(8), 1021–1035.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2024.2320843>

Page left intentionally blank

Glossary

accessible/accessibility: Making sure children and families can fully participate by removing barriers in the environment, materials, communication, and activities.

adaptations: Intentional changes, including accommodations and modifications, that promote child participation in learning experiences to enhance child competence and eliminate or reduce barriers to increasing child participation in learning activities and routines.

anti-bias education: An intentional approach to education that supports children's development of a confident sense of identity, a respect for human differences, and the knowledge and skills they need to recognize and respond to unfairness.

assistive technology: A device or tool that helps an individual maintain, gain, or improve daily functioning (for example, wheelchairs, glasses, hearing aids, ramps); devices can range from light-tech options like foam pencil grips to higher-tech options like speech recognition devices.

attachment relationships: The relationships a child forms in infancy and toddlerhood with the individuals who provide their primary care that serve as the model for infants' and toddlers' interactions and relationships with others.

children with disabilities or developmental delays: Children who either have been identified as having a disability as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B (ages 3 years to 22 years) or who may be experiencing a developmental delay in areas such as cognitive, physical, communication, social and emotional, or adaptive development as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C (ages birth through three years).

coaching: A collaborative, strengths-based process in which a coach supports an educator to reflect, set goals, practice new strategies, and improve their work over time.

community of practice: A group of professionals with a common interest or goal who regularly collaborate, reflect, and learn together to broaden their knowledge and improve their practice.

coregulation: The process of providing children with supportive, calming interactions that help them regulate their emotions and behaviors. Coregulation involves educators responding sensitively and appropriately to children's needs, such as providing comfort, soothing, and attention, which helps the child feel secure and supported.

culture: The customs, values, beliefs, and practices of a group of people. Cultural values and norms inform family roles, rituals, communication styles, emotional expression, social interactions, and learned behavior.

curriculum: A cohesive set of principles and learning goals, along with intentional teaching strategies, activities and learning experiences, materials, and assessments, that are organized over time to guide what children learn and how instruction supports them to learn and thrive.

developmental screenings: Formal questionnaires or checklists used to assess a child's development in different domains or across domains of development. They are an important step in the process of identifying a potential disability or developmental delay.

early learning and care setting: A place in which educators provide early educational experiences and nurturance to support young children's learning, development, and well-being. Settings include family child care homes, center-based settings, and school-based settings.

educator: Individuals, including leaders, who are responsible for the early learning and care of children in preschool settings. Educators include family child care providers, teachers, assistants, aides, substitutes, education specialists, education coordinators, and others with similar responsibilities.

environment: A space that is intentionally set up by an educator in a setting where children receive care, learn, and develop.

implicit bias: Attitudes or internalized stereotypes that unconsciously affect our perceptions, actions, and decisions. These unconscious biases often affect behavior that leads to unequal treatment of people based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, health status, and other characteristics.

Individualized Education Program: A written plan that outlines a child's special education services, goals, and supports to meet their unique learning needs in an educational setting.

Individualized Family Services Plan: A written plan for infants and toddlers (birth through age 3) in early intervention that outlines the child and family's outcomes, services, and family supports based on the family's resources, priorities, and concerns.

inquiry-based learning: Learning experiences that invite children to deeply explore concepts and environments through activities and interactions that are child-initiated and informed by children's interests.

language varieties: A specific form of a language that may include variations in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Language varieties occur naturally from differences in geography, demographics, and context.

leader: An educator who has leadership and administrative responsibilities for operating a preschool setting, including family child care homes and center-based and school-based early learning and care settings. Leaders include operators of small or large family child care homes, directors or administrators of single-site or multisite settings, and others who have similar responsibilities.

mentoring: A partnership in which a more experienced individual (a mentor) supports the professional development of a less experienced individual (a mentee).

multilingual learner: A child who is learning two or more languages at the same time.

preschool setting: An early learning and care setting primarily serving children who are 3 through 5 years old

reflective practice: An ongoing process in which educators—individually and with others—thoughtfully look back on their practices and children's learning to evaluate their work, gain new insights, and continuously improve their interactions and teaching.

reflective supervision: A process in which the educator reflects on their own observations, challenges, and perceptions while the supervisor actively listens and reflects on the educator's position.

resilience: The ability to adapt and grow stronger when faced with challenges and stress. As a person grows, they learn to use supports and strategies to maintain their well-being, even in difficult situations.

routine: A consistent and predictable sequence of events or actions that meet the care and learning needs of individual children. Routines may include greetings, transitions, mealtimes/snack times, toileting, and nap times.

scaffolding: The support that educators provide to children to help them learn a new skill, solve a problem, or accomplish a task. Scaffolding provides a child with just enough support to be able to continue on their own. The support is individually adapted to each child based on an understanding of the child's strengths and needs.

self-reflection: The intentional process of thinking about one's own actions, experiences, and beliefs to better understand their impact on one's practice and gain insights into how to improve it.

staff/staff member: All individuals employed or self-employed in family child care homes and center-based and school-based early learning and care settings. This includes leaders, educators, and other staff (e.g., program specialists, administrative support staff, family engagement coordinators, cooks, bus drivers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists) who contribute to the early learning and care of children.

temperament tendencies: The physiological, emotional, and behavioral ways that infants and young children relate to people, things, and situations. Temperament tendencies include how active children often are, how reactive they are to unexpected situations, and how attentive they are when there are distractions.

translanguaging: A multilingual individual's use and understanding of their full language repertoire without separation of the languages. For example, a child may use a mix of languages when expressing a single thought or sentence. Many children also understand when to use one language when communicating with one individual and another language when communicating with a different individual.

trauma: A harmful and sometimes prolonged psychological and physiological stress response caused by an adverse environment or stressful event (including, but not limited to, experiencing abuse or neglect, domestic violence, food or housing insecurity, immigration, racism, ableism, family separations, death or illness of a family member, or medical trauma).

trauma-informed practice: An approach that recognizes how trauma can affect children's development and behavior and that uses safe, consistent, and supportive relationships and environments to reduce stress and promote healing and learning.

Universal Design for Learning: An approach that offers guidelines for supporting the learning of all children through using multiple means for engagement, representation, action, and expression.

zone of proximal development: A range of learning tasks that a child cannot yet do independently, but can do successfully with guidance from a more knowledgeable person or with supportive tools.



California Department of Social Services