

Early Learning Guidelines (ELG) are a way to define the developmental and learning outcomes for our children across all care settings, including home, relative care, child care, preschool, and Head Start. Every state, the District of Columbia, and the federal Head Start program have early learning standards or guidelines

Early Learning Guidelines are defined as *research-based, measurable descriptions of the things we expect young children to know and be able to do at each age and stage of development*. Early Learning Guidelines are the “roadmap” for planning, carrying out, and evaluating an early childhood environment to ensure that it supports children’s development and learning.

Who are the Early Learning Guidelines for?

The ELG give everyone – from parents to policy makers – common language and common expectations for children’s development and learning.

Parents and family member

- Build awareness of development
- Increase communication between parents and other caregivers
- Increase awareness of quality care and education

Caregivers and teachers

- Guide planning for learning experiences that build foundational skills
- Provide direction for planning appropriate assessment
- Give direction to practitioner training and development
- Install accountability for the education offered to children

Community and Policymakers

- Establish a framework for assessing the needs within the community
- Assess the impact of public policies on young children and their families
- Improve public understanding of appropriate expectations, accountability, responsibility

How are the Early Learning Guidelines organized?

ELG identify the domains – or developmental areas – of early development and learning, and provide specific indicators that demonstrate children’s progress. In North Dakota, the guidelines have been divided into two documents: *Early Learning Guidelines Birth-Three* and *Early Learning Guidelines Three-Five*.

ND Early Learning Guidelines for Three-Five are divided into 8 developmental domains:

1. Health and Physical Development
2. Social and Emotional Development
3. Approaches to Learning
4. Expressive Arts and Creative Thinking
5. Language and Literacy
6. Mathematics and Logical Thinking
7. Science and Problem Solving
8. Social Studies

ND Early Learning Guidelines for Birth-Three are divided into 4 developmental domains:

1. Social and Emotional Development
2. Language Development and Communication
3. Cognitive Development
4. Physical and Motor Development

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Another important aspect of ELG is that they are designed to align with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction Content Standards for K-12 to better support kindergarten readiness for children. Use of the ND ELG is **voluntary**.

In addition to developmental domains, the two documents contain similar information...

- **Components or Sub-categories:** important areas of development within each domain
- **Indicators or Benchmarks:** observable behaviors that show children's progress in gaining the competencies, knowledge, skills, and behaviors specified in each component
- **Guiding Principles:** the knowledge base of early childhood research, theory, and practice upon which the ELG are based
- **Strategies for Programs, Adults, and Caregivers:** factors and practices carried out by adults to support children's development and learning

How can adults use the Early Learning Guidelines to plan developmentally appropriate learning environments for young children?

Young children are at a unique period in human development and therefore, they need unique learning experiences, specifically hands-on activities in a play-based environment. This does not mean random play but rather play experiences that are carefully and intentionally planned to provide learning opportunities for children. The ELG are a tool to help adults intentionally plan for children's development and learning by continually making decisions about what to do next for each child. The process of planning for children's development and learning is a continuous cycle that looks like this:

Step 1: PLAN

1. **Assessment:** Review each child's interests, capabilities, learning style, and prior experiences
2. **Develop an idea:** Brainstorm ideas for activities based on what you know about the children and your goals for them
3. **Identify the relevant ELG domains and indicators:** Using your goals for children, select the ELG domains and indicators that promote the goals
4. **Predict possible outcomes:** Consider how specific children will react or help they may need
5. **Think of open-ended questions:** Brainstorm questions to ask before, during, and after the activity to help children focus on their work and expand their thinking

Step 2: DOCUMENT

1. **Carry out the activity:** Stay close to children and provide support
2. **Document children's responses:** Jot down quick notes of children's responses to the activity. Note the skills and knowledge they demonstrate
3. **Make and update children's developmental portfolios:** For each child, make a portfolio in which you keep evidence of children's development. Add any documentation you gathered that shows a child's growth and learning.

Step 3: EVALUATION

1. **Reflect and evaluate:** Consider how well the activity worked and how children showed what they learned.
2. **Review and plan again:** What will you plan that will support what the children learned and will take their experience further?

Learn more... View a free PowerPoint overview of the ELG at www.ndchildcare.org or register for the ELG training to earn 2-clock hours. Copies of the ELG documents can be downloaded at the website under the "Training" tab in the "Professional Development" section. To receive a paper copy, contact your regional CCR&R office.

Leading the Way for Child Care in North Dakota

Eastern North Dakota 800-941-7003 or 218-299-7026 ~ Western North Dakota 888-223-1510 or 701-223-1510

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