NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR CHILDREN BIRTH TO FOUR YEARS (NELDS)

Department of Basic Education
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The National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) is a curriculum-related policy initiative focusing primarily on the early learning needs of children from birth to four years.

FOREWORD

Since the new South African political dispensation in 1994, Early Childhood Development (ECD) has been recognised and identified as a critical nodal point for the country's social and economic transformation and development. Government departments, together with non-government organisations, have forged partnerships at different stages of ECD development in the country to create policies and programmes that have enabled ECD services to improve.

These services mainly pertain to health, social and education needs. Currently ECD in this country boasts some of the best policies in the world. Our focus in delivering these policies has been towards ensuring that government resources are used maximally and efficiently to meet the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged young children. However, we still need to strengthen the implementation processes of these policies.

The National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) is a curriculum-related policy initiative focusing primarily on the early learning needs of children from birth to four years. The development of this document entailed a validation process for verification of the standards' content and age appropriateness. Validation consultations were conducted with various stakeholders such as training organisations and practitioners who provided feedback on the validity of the content. The age validation informed this final version of the NELDS.

NELDS provides early learning standards expressed as desired results, indicators and competencies of expected learning achievements for young children in a designated age range. NELDS also suggests appropriate activities that adults can initiate to enhance early learning development.

NELDS is not an exhaustive list of developmental milestones or all the ways in which adults can support young children. It has been designed as the basis from which more comprehensive material can be developed to suit different audiences and contexts in which children are growing, learning and developing. NELDS is designed to support work already begun in the sector through strengthening the knowledge and understanding of children's learning needs and requirements.

NELDS will assist ECD trainers and early learning material developers with information and ideas on appropriate content to include in their resources. It is therefore expected that NELDS will be used for a variety of purposes to improve children's learning experiences in the different environments where they are being cared for. Different resources such as curriculum materials will be developed for parents, practitioners, teachers and trainers for enhancing, supporting and enriching children's learning and development.

It is envisaged that NELDS will improve the holistic development of children through the implementation of creative approaches towards children's learning, language, literacy and communication, cognition and general knowledge, physical and health well-being, as well as self-identity and awareness.

Effective use of NELDS will assist us as parents, trainers, practitioners, educators and policy makers to provide the best early learning experiences for the future citizens of this country.

Mr D Hindle
Director-General

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Written comments and suggestions were also contributed by education experts from higher education institutions. We acknowledge the inputs from Mrs Ndileleni Paulinah Mudzielwana (University of Venda), Professor MW de Witt (University of South Africa), Ms Joan Orr (University of South Africa), Dr Nkidi Phatudi (University of Pretoria), Dr Hassina Ebrahim (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and Ms Elaine Harcombe (Wits University).

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NELDS is meant to ensure that the stated developmental expectations in children (i.e. desired results) are achieved. In order for this to happen, NELDS can be used and implemented in a variety of ways. The major use should be in the development of resources and materials for the following:

- Monitoring national progress in the birth to four years learning programmes
- Improving early learning and teaching experiences
- Designing and improving parenting skills and programmes
- Assisting with caregiver preparations
- Improving public knowledge of children's development
- Developing school readiness tools
- Supporting and improving curriculum development
- Evaluating early learning programmes

It should be noted that there could be other uses for NELDS and we encourage users of this resource to be innovative and creative in this regard. Uses should also be integrated in order to gain maximum positive benefit of NELDS.

NELDS promotes using an integrated perspective which reflects the childcare and education curricular visions of the different departments that handle and provide services for young children. With an integrated approach, the vision of holistic development in South African policies can be realised.

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INTRODUCTION

The National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) has been designed as a support for those who want to provide young children with the best possible start in life. It is based on the understanding that there is rapid development in children from birth to four years and that with a solid foundation they can grow into active and responsible citizens who are well prepared to make the most of all opportunities and experiences.

This document is a starting point for the development of, for example, a curriculum; centre or home-based programmes; training courses for practitioners, parents and other caregivers; evaluation and monitoring tools; and messages advocating for children's education, care and rights.

NELDS contains important developmental indicators and ideas for appropriate activities that adults can initiate to promote these. It is not an exhaustive list of developmental milestones or all the ways in which adults can support young children. It has been designed as the basis from which more comprehensive material is developed to suit different audiences and contexts. Some competencies are repeated across age groups, and some adult strategies are also repeated as it is difficult at times to make clear divisions in the development of children from birth to four.

It is envisaged that NELDS will help to fill the gap that exists in the country with regard to the needs of children from birth to four. It has been developed in the knowledge that the growth and development of young children should be seen holistically and include health, welfare, rights, and education, care and diversity issues.

Background

In South Africa Early Childhood Development (ECD) is defined as "*a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years with active participation of practitioners, their parents and other caregivers*" (White Paper 5, 2001. p 7). The country's vision for ECD is to protect children's rights by providing environments and resources for the development of a child's full potential in all aspects of growth and development: cognitive, emotional, social, physical and moral.

Research has shown that quality care and education during early childhood are beneficial to children's growth and development throughout their lives. Environments and programmes must provide varied and age-appropriate experiences for young children in the years before formal schooling. This will ensure that children grow up with the necessary skills and capabilities to cope with the expectations of childhood and later, with adulthood.

In South Africa, the provisioning and planning of services and programmes for children from birth to four are the responsibility of several government departments. Internationally this has proved to be problematic and has led to children's needs not being adequately and effectively provided for with poor standards of service largely being due to lack of coordination and collaboration between departments. Integrated approaches to childcare and education as the best way to meet children's needs holistically are fast becoming a critical aspect in ECD policy development and implementation.

The South African government has, through various policies, called for an integrated and intersectoral strategy in order to manage the care and education of children from birth to four. ECD policies, such as White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education and the Social Development White Paper on ECD, emphasise the need for different departments and other organisations to collaborate and work together on programmes for children from birth to four. This will ensure that quality and appropriate programmes for the care and education of young children are developed and implemented in the country.

NELDS promotes using an integrated perspective which reflects the childcare and education curricular visions of the different departments that handle and provide services for young children. With an integrated approach, the vision of holistic development in South African policies can be realised.

Childcare services in South Africa

This document can be used by childcare and education providers in a range of settings. In South Africa, the childcare and education services must provide for all children including those who are orphaned and vulnerable. The following are the categories of services provided:

- Home care within a family setting
- Custodial care
- Private institutions
- Independent institutions
- Aftercare services
- School-based services

Guiding principles

The South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) emphasises democratic values, social justice, improved quality of life for all, equality and protection of all citizens. The guiding principles of this document are based on the Constitution and are therefore that:

- Adults have the responsibility for ensuring that the rights of children are protected and their growth and development are promoted.
- Children need to develop a positive self-identity early in life. They need to understand their identity as South African citizens and aspire to contribute positively to, and benefit from, their community, their country and the rest of the world.
- Children need to develop skills, knowledge, values and attitudes for living and coping with life and its challenges, as well as life-long learning experiences.
- An appreciation and understanding of inclusivity, equity and diversity needs to be fostered in early childhood through anti-bias curriculum practices.
- An integrated child-centred approach is critical to ensure holistic growth and development of young children. This allows for a child's freedom of expression and ability to explore their environment and experience healthy well-being.

Purpose of NELDS

The document is designed to provide children with the best start in life by equipping their caregivers, teachers, practitioners and parents with information and knowledge on how to ensure that their children's early experiences at home and in institutionalised forms of care and education are developmentally appropriate.

The document will also specifically assist in the development of programmes and activities to enable children to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that are relevant for further and continuous development. It will empower parents and caregivers on how to enrich children's environments by understanding their growth and development processes, their competencies and capabilities and what they require.

SECTION 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN BIRTH TO FOUR YEARS

This period in a child's life is generally characterised and described by the strands or domains relating to physical, emotional, cognitive, language and social development. What children do and are expected to do at different stages of growth within the above domains/strands can be used to characterise, understand and assess their growth and development.

Most children move through similar stages of development, but not all children do this at the same pace.

Each child is unique and different not only in their appearance, but also in how they develop and grow.

- Most children learn by actively engaging with the world around them. Each child learns in their own way, and how they grow and develop depends on their environment and the kind of interactions they have with their parents, caregivers, peers and siblings.
- Most children are curious, and adults must take their explorations and questions seriously so that learning becomes an enjoyable experience.
- Children benefit from a close and loving involvement with an adult. A stable relationship provides the basis from which children can move with confidence from the family to being part of the wider community.
- Children grow up in a diverse society and adults need to help them learn to respect others and to avoid bias based on race, gender, ability, language or beliefs.

In this document, children are categorised into the following age groups on the understanding that there will be overlap between these. The differences in individual children's developmental progress and pace are accommodated by using a broad range in the age categories. Smaller age ranges and the related developmental indicators and competencies could be dealt with in programmes that are designed using this document as a starting point.

The age categories are:

- Babies: 0 – 18 months
- Toddlers: 18 – 36 years
- Young children: 3 – 4 years

Barriers may slow down growth and development in children. Children who experience these barriers face various difficulties that must be understood in the context of differences in how children grow and develop.

SECTION 2: STRATEGIES FOR ENABLING POSITIVE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

Adults need to ensure that they support children to reach their full potential. The following are strategies that are universal and should be endorsed by all adults:

- Children need nutritious food and safe sanitation.
- Children must receive regular routine medical and dental check-ups and immunisations.
- Medical care must be available when there is concern about a child's physical health, development and well-being.
- Opportunities for active play must be provided.
- Children should have the freedom to choose and direct their activities according to their individual needs and interests.
- Verbal, visual and physical cues must be provided to help children learn.
- Materials in indoor and outdoor environments must be easily accessible to all children.
- Indoor and outdoor environments must be safe for young children.
- Children need an adult's undivided attention when they are talking or indicating the need to communicate.
- Children should be encouraged and motivated and should never be belittled.
- Discipline must be consistent and age appropriate.
- A child's own language should be used whenever possible and especially when sharing important information.

Barriers to growth and development

Adults caring for and educating children need to have an understanding of barriers to growth and development. These barriers are what make it difficult for a child to reach the developmental milestones that are expected of them at a particular stage in their lives. These barriers can be biological, physical, environmental, emotional, mental or social. Some biological and physical barriers are visible and easy to identify, and others are not.

Barriers may slow down growth and development in children. Children who experience these barriers face various difficulties that must be understood in the context of differences in how children grow and develop.

Below are examples of some of the difficulties that children with barriers to experience. These difficulties can be used as signals of problems:

- Difficulty moving, e.g. grasping an object, walking or crawling.
- Difficulty learning to speak and hear.
- Physical and biological malformations in the body at birth or during the growth process.
- Difficulty becoming attached to and interacting with people in order to develop relationships.
- Difficulty with pre-reading and literacy related skills.
- Difficulty performing given tasks in a learning environment.
- Difficulty remembering or recalling routines or information.
- Lack of self-discipline and self-control.
- Lack of concentration when engaging in tasks.

It is important to note that when children demonstrate some of the above behaviours, it does not necessarily mean that they have barriers to growth and development. The types of behaviours and the extent to which they are demonstrated are often signals of some form of barrier; an adult should seek assistance to determine the seriousness of these.

In cases where barriers to learning are not physically obvious, these signals can help in the early identification of possible barriers. Adults will then be able to help the child receive the necessary care and support.

Children with barriers, like any other children, need to be encouraged and praised especially in areas where they are strong and in which they have an interest.

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How to deal with barriers to growth and development in young children

Adults need to have a general understanding of how to deal with barriers to growth and development in children and when to contact a specialist who understands, detects and deals with these.

The following are general guidelines for dealing with barriers to learning, and they may apply to home or institutional care settings or both:

- Accept children with barriers for who they are – as children with potential in other aspects of growth and development who need to be nurtured.
- Take into account the special needs of children with barriers to growth and development when planning activities and programmes.
- Provide the relevant resources and materials needed for them to develop and grow.
- Do not treat children with barriers differently from others, except to make provision for what they cannot do.
- If a child shows any signs of barriers, inform the parents or caregivers but be very certain that you have properly identified the problem.
- Keep a list of information on organisations, associations and medical institutions that deal with barriers to growth and development for consultation and referrals.
- Familiarise yourself with government policies, regulations and various documents regarding barriers to growth and development across different departments.

Children with barriers, like any other children, need to be encouraged and praised especially in areas where they are strong and in which they have an interest.

- Learn more about a child's specific barrier and find ways of helping them to compensate for this.
- Involve them in normal routines and activities in the centre or home whenever possible. Their barrier/s should never prevent them from being part of the centre or their home.
- Severe barriers need specialist attention and this should not be taken lightly. In some cases, children would need to be at special schools or places of care.
- Parents should not ignore their responsibility to care for the child. Once a barrier has been identified, they should work with other caregivers and specialists to help the child as far as possible.
- Records should be kept of the child's behaviour and progress especially at specific times, e.g. when the child is receiving some form of treatment or specific care, record their reaction to it.

Expert help for barriers to growth and development

It is critical to note that in situations where signs of barriers to growth and development in a child have been identified, consultation with a specialist in that particular barrier should be sought.

Children are born with some natural abilities and skills which they use to communicate and relate to people and their environments. For children to reach their full potential, they need to be supported by adults in their homes and in enriched childcare environments.

Defining desired results

NELDS has adopted the term 'desired results' to describe the broadly expected competencies that children should acquire and develop through planned and unplanned programmes and activities, both in the home and in institutionalised care and education environments. These desired results cut across the traditional domains of childhood development: physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language, perceptual as well as moral and spiritual. Sometimes aesthetic development is also added to this list.

NELDS promotes an integrated approach to encompass all the different skills, knowledge and abilities that children are expected and encouraged to attain in the different domains of their development. The integrated approach is appropriate as it relates directly to how children learn. Children grow and develop through exposure to various experiences which occur concurrently and interactively, affecting the different areas of child development. For example, a specific experience or activity might enhance competencies in the social and physical domains, as well as in the cognitive domains. It is therefore more critical to highlight the broad competencies that children are expected to acquire from a programme and activities, rather than the specific skills and abilities from a particular development domain.

In NELDS, the same desired results apply to all children from birth to four. Each desired result has indicators and specific competencies. These are outlined according to the different age ranges.

The desired results are aimed at:

Assisting in ensuring that children learn in an integrated way.

Enabling parents, practitioners and other caregivers to provide appropriate programmes and strategies to support children's learning activities.

Providing the basis for lifelong learning.

The desired results are:

Children are learning how to think critically, solve problems and form concepts.

Children are becoming more aware of themselves as individuals, developing a positive self-image and learning how to manage their own behaviour.

Children are demonstrating growing awareness of diversity and the need to respect and care for others.

Children are learning to communicate effectively and use language confidently.

Children are learning about mathematical concepts.

Children are beginning to demonstrate physical and motor abilities and an understanding of a healthy lifestyle.

The table on the following pages shows the desired results with their indicators. The indicators are a breakdown of the knowledge, skills and attitudes which show that children are working towards achieving the desired results. Under each indicator are examples of competencies for each age range, as well as examples of what parents and other caregivers can do to assist children in the development of those competencies.

Children are unique in every aspect such as how, what and when they learn. Therefore, the competencies are by no means prescriptive. They are examples of what parents and educators should be observing and expecting of their children in order to eventually achieve the desired results. The competencies are also not all fixed in the age ranges indicated; some of them cut across the different age ranges depending on each child's development and growth experiences.

Validation process

There are three stages to producing early learning standards: the development of the standards, validation and implementation. Validation is the process by which the standards are tested to find out if what is stated in the standards is true and accurate. Validation provides scientific information on which recommendations are made as to whether the standards are a reflection of what children in a country know and are able to do. Standards are a foundation on which other programmes and initiatives are developed and implemented; for this reason they need to be authentic and ethical. Validation helps to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the standards.

Validation of these standards has entailed two processes: content validation and age validation. The content validation involved meetings and workshops with:

- Representatives of ECD non-government organisations
- Representatives of provincial Departments of Education (ECD)
- Parents (rural and urban areas)
- ECD practitioners (rural and urban areas)

Written submissions were also obtained from:

- Higher education institution staff responsible for ECD courses
- A provincial ECD working group

Document analysis was also conducted using relevant ECD resources.

The comments and findings of the content validation process were used to revise and rewrite the NELDS.

The content validated and revised NELDS were then age validated. This process involved identifying relevant target groups of children, caregivers and parents from diverse social, economic and geographical settings and backgrounds. The desired results, indicators and competencies were then tested using observations, the Kilifi Development Inventory and language tests relevant to each competency. Changes were made to the standards following the results of the tests and recommendations were made.

The major result from the age validation for NELDS was the creation of age validation codes A, B and C to indicate the extent to which the standards were achieved. The coding of the competencies in the standards has implications for the uses of the standards, particularly in relation to the development of curricula as well as teaching and learning programmes.

The codes are:

A: This denotes a competency which should be achieved by most healthy children in the age group, with the exception of the very young.

B: These are likely to be competencies which are relatively new or close to being achieved, or not yet performed reliably.

C: These are competencies likely to be achieved only by the older children in the age category, or those in very favourable environments.

DESIRED RESULT 1	CHILDREN ARE LEARNING HOW TO THINK CRITICALLY, SOLVE PROBLEMS AND FORM CONCEPTS		
DEVELOPMENT AREA: COGNITIVE			
Introduction	The ability to think critically, solve problems and form concepts cuts across all aspects of a child's growth and development and helps a child to manage and to learn from experiences and different situations.		
Standard 1	Children use all their senses to make links between themselves and the objects around them and learn that choices have consequences (cause and effect)		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Use their bodies to explore their environment • Watches people, objects and events • Reaches for an object when it is offered • Drops objects and watches them fall • Copies holding two objects to bring them together to make a sound • Uses a radial grasp • Holds two blocks in one hand	A A A A B B C	• Provide safe opportunities for touching, tasting, watching, sliding on stomach, crawling or toddling • Give babies things that rattle so they learn, e.g. shaking a rattle produces a sound • Respond to a baby smiling or crying to confirm that actions bring results • Use words to describe the child's actions • Play games in which the child copies what you do and encourage them by copying something they do
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Asks the names of things and people they see • Begins to use most objects for their intended purpose • Begins to identify relationships, e.g. water and sand make mud • Links sounds to objects or makes realistic guesses	A A A A	• Respond to your child and answer their questions • Praise children when they attempt to help themselves • Involve children in the kitchen when it is safe to do so, e.g. mixing juice, mixing dry and wet ingredients when preparing porridge or cakes • Identify and talk about sounds and objects in the house or when walking outside
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Asks "why" questions about the effect of certain actions • Begins to predict the effect of certain actions • Starts to use the future tense	A A B/C	• Encourage children to speculate by asking "What if….?", "What will happen next?" questions

DESIRED RESULT 1	CHILDREN ARE LEARNING HOW TO THINK CRITICALLY, SOLVE PROBLEMS AND FORM CONCEPTS		
Standard 2	Children often imitate reality as they engage in imaginative play		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Recognises familiar people and objects • Relates familiar objects to their needs • Imitates animal sounds • Relates to dolls and toys as if they were real	A A A C	• Talk to your baby about people and objects around him or her • Talk to your child about what you are doing together, e.g. eating, drinking, washing • Name animals and repeat the sounds they make in a playful way
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Imitates simple, everyday activities • Begins to follow instructions • Plays with small dolls or toys, talking about what they are doing • Imitates others in imaginative play, e.g. mother, father	A B B B	• Include children in looking at a book, sweeping, etc. • Play games where the child follows instructions, e.g. clap hands, stamp your feet • Join in make-believe play if invited • Listen when children tell you about their imaginary games • Provide materials to encourage imaginative play
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Wants to help adults in domestic activities and repeat these on their own • Uses one or two items of clothing to extend their imaginative play • Describes at least two characters from familiar stories or television programmes • Uses fantasy figures in imaginative games • Acts out parts of stories after hearing them	A A A A B	• Give children smaller versions of brooms, cloths and bowls to use with you and later when playing • Allow children to play with items of clothing like hats, scarves, shoes, etc. • Read and discuss stories with children, invite them to provide alternative endings

DESIRED RESULT 1	CHILDREN ARE LEARNING HOW TO THINK CRITICALLY, SOLVE PROBLEMS AND FORM CONCEPTS		
Standard 3	Children draw on their experiences to play creatively and find ways to solve problems		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Uses some objects for their intended purpose, e.g. reaches for breast or bottle when hungry • Gestures for help when trying to do something • Finds objects hidden while they are watching	A B C	• Talk to your child about what you are doing, as you do it • Play hide-and-seek games or hide items behind things, e.g. a scarf • Play simple games when changing, feeding or washing your child • Provide children with a range of toys and safe household objects to play with • Put small toys or things under a container and ask them to find them, e.g. "Where did it go?" • Take children with you when visiting new places and talk about what you see
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Links objects with environment, e.g. a coat or jersey in cold weather • Uses objects creatively to accomplish certain tasks • Asks for help to complete a task • Tries new ways to complete an activity if at first unsuccessful	B B B B	• Explain use and purpose of different objects when using them • When reading stories, talk about what people are doing and why • Let children discover how to use safe household objects on their own before demonstrating yourself • Respond positively to children when they ask you to play with them or help them • Talk to children about what they are doing and offer suggestions rather than taking over an activity and completing it for them • Remind children of earlier activities, e.g. "Remember when you ..."
Young children: 3 – 4	• Manages many everyday tasks without guidance	B	• Praise children who try to, e.g. set the table, sort washing, dress themselves

DESIRED RESULT 2	CHILDREN ARE BECOMING MORE AWARE OF THEMSELVES AS INDIVIDUALS, DEVELOPING A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE AND LEARNING HOW TO MANAGE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOUR		
DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS: SOCIAL, PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL			
Introduction	Children need unconditional love and acceptance and to have this expressed often. Children need to understand who they are and how to develop independence. This will help them develop characteristics that will enable them to take responsibility for themselves and for the well-being of others as they grow up.		
Standard 1	Children begin to recognise their own characteristics, abilities and preferences		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Explores own body • Reacts when called by name • Uses both hands but may start to prefer to use either left or right hand • Identifies self in mirror • Tries to do some things for themselves • Points to things they want but which are out of reach	B A C C C B	• Be aware of your facial expressions and try to show positive feelings towards your child • Use children's names when speaking to them • Play games, naming parts of the body when dressing or washing your child • Encourage and praise children when they try to do something by themselves • Get down to the child's level so that you can keep eye contact
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Identifies things that belong to them • Points to and repeats names of parts of the body, e.g. hands, feet, eyes • Knows members of own family • Recognises self in photographs when adult shows them • Knows full name • Knows age • Knows gender • Uses own name and "mine" when playing • Shows preferences for what to do or wear	A B A A B B C B B	• Allow child time to try out skills, e.g. eating, dressing • Make a space where children can keep their own clothes and other things that belong to them • Encourage your child to take small steps towards independence • Encourage child to show you what they can do, e.g. feed a pet, put on a jersey, wash themselves • Allow children to make choices whenever possible

DESIRED RESULT 2	CHILDREN ARE BECOMING MORE AWARE OF THEMSELVES AS INDIVIDUALS, DEVELOPING A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE AND LEARNING HOW TO MANAGE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOUR		
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Gives full name • Gives age • Gives gender • Gives where they live • Becomes more independent and proud of what they can do • Knows family members and neighbours or other people they see regularly • Describes some aspects of themselves, e.g. colour of hair, gender	A A A B A A B	• When in groups, make sure every child is valued for themselves and what they can do • When planning an activity or outing, talk to your child about what needs to be prepared beforehand • Talk to children about themselves and comment positively on their features, abilities, etc.
Standard 2	Children are learning to express their feelings and emotions and how to respond to those of others		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Responds to family members • Makes sounds to get attention • Repeats actions that get a positive response from others • Imitates facial expressions showing emotions, such as happy or sad	A A B A/B	• Include your baby in family times, e.g. mealtimes • Encourage siblings to talk and show affection to the baby • Respond to a child's actions by showing appreciation • Play games with your child in which you make faces at each other
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Plays contentedly but clings to adults when tired or afraid • Likes to keep hold of own possessions • Begins to recognise and name feelings	A B B	• Demonstrate sharing something of yours with children without expecting them to do the same with their possessions • Tell stories that include naming feelings • Model ways of showing strong feelings
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Says what causes some feelings they experience	B	• Talk about favourite things and activities and share your reasons for enjoying these

DESIRED RESULT 2	CHILDREN ARE BECOMING MORE AWARE OF THEMSELVES AS INDIVIDUALS, DEVELOPING A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE AND LEARNING HOW TO MANAGE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOUR		
Standard 3	Children are learning to regulate themselves and follow routines		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Begins to settle into a routine for eating, sleeping, etc. • Is aware of daily routines • Is able to follow simple instructions	B B B	• Accommodate your child's needs in household routines • Try to make your home safe and point out any dangerous places (e.g. plugs) with a simple "no" and limit the number of these "no's"
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Develops more of an understanding of acceptable behaviour • Waits for a short time to have needs met • Develops acceptable behaviour • Begins to understand that there are consequences to not following simple rules	B B A A	• Play short waiting games with your child • Talk about how you would like your child to behave, especially when trying something new • Praise children if they behave in an acceptable way • Involve children in planning routines • Simplify rules and be consistent • Explain consequences of rules not being followed and make sure these are age appropriate
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Develops self-discipline • Able to obey rules • Recognises some limits and dangers • Greets and thanks others usually	A B A B	• Encourage children to help you make rules and help them understand the reason for these • Always greet, thank and show respect for your child

DESIRED RESULT 3	CHILDREN DEMONSTRATE GROWING AWARENESS OF DIVERSITY AND THE NEED TO RESPECT AND CARE FOR OTHERS		
DEVELOPMENT AREAS: SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE			
Introduction	Children need to understand that other people may have a different lifestyle to theirs. Children need to understand that this diversity in society must be respected.		
Standard 1	Children begin to understand, appreciate and respect differences and similarities between themselves and others		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age Validation Codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Begins to be interested in and respond to adults • Responds differently to different people	A B	• Model acceptance and interest in others • Greet others and encourage your child to wave or smile • Look at books with illustrations of people both similar to and different from your child
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Is interested in the behaviour of other children and people • Notices gender differences	A B	• When looking at books, mention differences and similarities with your child in a positive way • Use books and pictures as a way of talking about gender, skin colour, hair texture, eyes, etc. and show appreciation of the range of these
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Plays with children across gender, racial and cultural differences	A/B	• Model and talk about acceptance and interest in others and their way of life • Use books, outings, celebrations, television to discuss and show acceptance of differences between people
Standard 2	Children begin to develop friendships and relate to their peers individually and in small and large groups		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Is attracted to other children and shows emotions, e.g. smiles or stares • Begins to play alongside other children • Shows an interest in other children	A B B	• Provide opportunities for your child to be near other children • Acknowledge children's feelings and support them to accept being with a range of people • Help children to play alongside one another with similar toys or household objects • Encourage siblings to sometimes share something with the child

DESIRED RESULT 3	CHILDREN DEMONSTRATE GROWING AWARENESS OF DIVERSITY AND THE NEED TO RESPECT AND CARE FOR OTHERS		
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Plays alongside other children but not with them • Is excited about being with other children • Understands sharing with other children • Co-operates with others in large group activities • Recognises familiar children	B A B B B	• Play simple games with more than one child at a time, e.g. rolling a ball to one another • Model co-operation with and concern for others • Talk about sharing with others
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Chooses who to play with • Joins in imaginative play with others • Shows concern and sympathy for others who are unhappy • Understands taking turns	A B B/A B	• When with other children, encourage your child to take turns, play turn-taking games • Praise children when they share with others
Standard 3	Children interact with adults and demonstrate the ability to adapt well to new situations		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Prefers to be near enough to see and hear a familiar adult • Is interested in people around them • Responds to familiar adults as well as parents	A B A	• Respond positively to a child's gestures for attention • Show affection and respond with hugs and cuddles • Stay close to your child and respond consistently • Bring your child into contact with other familiar adults
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Plays alone but prefers to be near a familiar adult or family member • Speaks to familiar adults • Asks questions and seeks responses from familiar adults	A A B	• Explain to children where you are going and that you will return • Listen to children • Make eye contact when communicating with children
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Asks permission to do something usually • Seeks help and comfort from familiar adults	A A	• Encourage and support children to find their own solutions, but offer help when necessary

DESIRED RESULT 4	CHILDREN ARE LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AND USE LANGUAGE		
DEVELOPMENT AREAS: SOCIAL AND COGNITIVE			
Introduction	Most children are born with the ability to speak. A child who receives a firm grounding in their mother tongue is better able to learn new languages and concepts. Adults must speak, sing, read to and listen to young children to support them as they learn to speak and listen, and later to read and write.		
Standard 1	Children listen, understand and respond when communicating with others		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Shows understanding of several words • Imitates adult's conversations by babbling • Repeats sounds made by others • Responds to gestures with gestures • Babbles to self with changes in tone and loudness • Listens when spoken to directly • Echoes some words	B B B B A A B	• Repeat sounds made by your child in a playful, turn-taking way • Help your child to make gestures, e.g. wave, clap hands • Talk to your child during everyday activities, naming objects, food, clothing, animals, etc. • Talk to your child using different tones, inflections and variations • Speak clearly to your child and make eye contact
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Uses up to 50 words • Recognises more words than they can say • Puts two or three words together • Uses personal pronouns, e.g. "me", "mine" • Carries on simple conversations • Pays attention when spoken to	B A A B A A	• Use correct vocabulary when talking to your child • Repeat what children say to show you understand and appreciate them • Model listening and talking with others • Play language games
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Talks in complete sentences • Takes turns in conversations • Speech can be understood even by those not familiar to the child	B B B	• Include children in conversations whenever possible • Encourage children to experiment with new words

DESIRED RESULT 4	CHILDREN ARE LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AND USE LANGUAGE		
Standard 2	Children respond to stories, songs, rhymes and books		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Points to pictures or objects when asked • Listens when sung to • Responds to action rhymes • Enjoys looking at pictures in books	C C C C	• Look at books together and point to and name objects • Make a collage of familiar objects and talk about these • Use your voice to make a story interesting • Imitate sounds and expressions of sadness, happiness, etc.
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Joins in songs and rhymes • Enjoys listening to stories and looking at books • Knows several rhymes • Has favourite books	B B B C	• Play games or tell stories using different voice volumes to help your child recognise "soft", "loud", etc. • Draw attention to print in your surroundings • Encourage your child to talk about pictures in books • Make daily story time fun and relaxing • Make storybooks together
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Tells stories with a mixture of fact and fantasy • Enjoys jokes • Sings familiar rhymes and songs correctly • Illustrates stories through simple drawings or acting	B A B B	• Talk to children about what they are doing • Encourage children to recall events, prompting when necessary • Read and tell a variety of stories of familiar and unfamiliar events • Encourage children to draw events from their day or from a story they have heard

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DESIRED RESULT 5	CHILDREN ARE LEARNING ABOUT MATHEMATICAL CONCEPTS		
DEVELOPMENT AREAS: COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL			
Introduction	Children's play and daily experiences provide opportunities for them to develop an understanding of many mathematical concepts. They do not need formal instruction but will benefit if adults talk to them about what they are experiencing.		
Standard 1	Children begin to demonstrate an understanding of number		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Grasps objects and explores them with hands and mouth • Enjoys finger play and rhythmic counting games • Points to facial features, e.g. nose, both ears	A C C	• Read stories and look at picture books with numbers • Sing and say number rhymes • Play games in which children can point to parts of their body and count them as they do so, e.g. "one nose", "two eyes"
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Counts by rote up to ten or more • Understands quantity up to two or three • Holds up fingers to tell age	C B B	• Provide opportunities for children to count real objects with you
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Counts by rote up to 20 • Begins to count objects in one-to-one correspondence up to five	C B	• When preparing a meal, ask the child to bring the correct number of plates for family members
Standard 2	Children begin to demonstrate an understanding of symbols, shapes, size and space		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Plays with differently sized containers and fills these with objects or liquids • Attempts to put objects into differently shaped openings	C C	• During washing and bathing, use containers to pour water and encourage your child to do this too • Provide children with objects of different shapes and sizes to hold and play with

DESIRED RESULT 5	CHILDREN ARE LEARNING ABOUT MATHEMATICAL CONCEPTS		
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Plays with shape puzzles • Plays with four-piece puzzles • Begins to categorise items according to characteristics, e.g. length, shape, colour • Puts objects correctly into same-shaped openings	C B B B	• Play with simple bought or made puzzles • Point out shapes of objects around the house • Talk about signs and symbols around you • Name and talk about the shape of items in books and magazines • Make matching picture cards with your child • Encourage your child to match household items, e.g. socks • Point out similarities between objects, e.g. "Your t-shirt is the same colour as my scarf"
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Recognises and names simple shapes • Uses measuring utensils • Talks about time, e.g. yesterday, today, tomorrow • Classifies and matches objects	A A B B/C	• Tell stories about events in the child's past • Provide cups, jugs and other containers for the child to play with in water when supervised • Play matching games

DESIRED RESULT 6	CHILDREN BEGIN TO DEMONSTRATE PHYSICAL AND MOTOR ABILITIES AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE		
DEVELOPMENT AREAS: PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE			
Introduction	Babies and young children are usually physically very active. Their bodies are developing and growing rapidly. They need nutritious food. Proper health care and a safe environment are very important to ensure growth and development.		
Standard 1	Children demonstrate abilities and interest in physical activities		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Demonstrates some eye-hand co-ordination	B/C	• Encourage children to move freely in a safe space
	• Picks up small objects with thumb and index finger	B	• Provide safe objects for holding, pushing or squeezing
	• May walk alone when one hand is held	B	• Allow children to feed themselves
	• Drops or throws objects forward	A/B	• Get down to the child's level and encourage them with smiles and talk to move towards you
	• Moves from lying down to sitting up	B	• Stand the child on your lap, hold hands and bounce him or her gently up and down
	• Feeds self with some help	B	• Sit facing your child and ask them to push a ball to you
	• Walks, stops and starts safely	B	• Hold a child's hand when walking, running, climbing and gradually withdraw this support
	• Pushes and pulls large toys, boxes and light objects around the floor	B	• Play stacking games using empty containers or blocks
	• Moves from sitting to standing	B	• Provide safe objects to pull, crawl into, and push
	• Walks up stairs with help	C	• Provide food that can be eaten using fingers
	• Builds a three-block tower	B	• Give child paper and thick crayons
	• Eats using a spoon, holds cup in both hands	B	
	• Holds pencil or crayons in hand to scribble	B	

DESIRED RESULT 6	CHILDREN BEGIN TO DEMONSTRATE PHYSICAL AND MOTOR ABILITIES AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE		
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Pushes and pulls toys • Throws small ball • Attempts to kick large ball • Moves rhythmically to music • Builds a five or six-block tower • Runs well • Climbs low walls or crèche equipment • Jumps with two feet together • Stands and walks on tiptoe • Threads large beads	A B B/C A A A B/C B B B	• Play body movement games with your child • Play music and dance with your child • Provide large and small balls and encourage your child to throw or kick them to you • Arrange outings to open spaces or parks where children can run freely and safely • Provide equipment for balancing, climbing and running through • Provide small wrapped objects and demonstrate how to unwrap these • Play clapping and movement games • Provide take-apart toys • Play catch-me games • Play ball games
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Jumps both backwards and forwards • Uses scissors to cut along a line	A B	• Encourage children to follow simple steps in dances • Make simple obstacle courses with boxes, cushions, etc. • Ask children to help with simple tasks lifting or pushing objects • Provide round-ended scissors and old magazines for cutting
Standard 2	Children will demonstrate preferences for different foods		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Begins to show preferences for what they want to taste • Explores food by experimenting and playing with it • Expresses when hungry or full • Accepts and requests favourite foods • Tries new food willingly • Chews food well	B B B C B B	• Offer the child a variety of foods • Spend time with the child during meals • Talk about the food they are eating • Model nutritious eating habits • Expect a child to like new food and offer it with encouragement • Do not show irritation if they make a mess when trying to feed themselves • Present food in an attractive way

DESIRED RESULT 6	CHILDREN BEGIN TO DEMONSTRATE PHYSICAL AND MOTOR ABILITIES AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE		
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Recognises new and different food • Has an idea of similarities and differences in tastes and appearances • Begins to understand which food is nutritious • Begins to help serve food or set out plates and spoons	A B B B	• Present small portions of a variety of foods at each meal • Help children to eat if they get tired of doing it themselves • Look through magazines and point out nutritious foods • Make collages of nutritious foods with your child • Provide small helpings of food and encourage children to ask for more if they need it
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Knows importance of eating clean food • Shows interest in trying new foods • Identifies some nutritious foods • Helps clean up any drinks or food spilt	A A B A	• Start a food garden and give children some responsibilities for its care • Provide different utensils for your child to use, e.g. spoon and fork
Standard 3	Children will demonstrate an awareness of health and safety		
Age categories	Some competencies	Age validation codes	Some examples of how adults can support the growth and development of babies and young children
Babies: 0 – 18 months	• Responds to warnings of danger • Shows an interest in washing hands with help • Understands basic safety rules	B C C	• Use words and gestures to show dangers, e.g. plugs, fire • Model hygienic behaviour, e.g. washing hands before eating and after going to the toilet • Use words, gestures and simple explanations to show household dangers
Toddlers: 18 – 36 months	• Often unaware of dangers but will listen to warnings • Imitates washing face, hands, etc. • Imitates brushing teeth • Washes hands relatively well • Needs to be reminded about dangers • Asks for nose to be wiped when necessary	B A A B A B	• Talk about clean and dirty • When washing or bathing children, encourage them to try to wash different parts of their body themselves • Practise safety drills in centre-based care • Praise children when they remember to wash their hands after using the toilet and before eating food • Point out dangers in the environment

DESIRED RESULT 6	CHILDREN BEGIN TO DEMONSTRATE PHYSICAL AND MOTOR ABILITIES AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE		
Young children: 3 – 4 years	• Identifies some dangerous situations, objects and symbols	A	• Help children to remember their addresses or describe where they live • Point out safety symbols, e.g. stop sign, fasten seatbelt, poison • If children tell you about an incident that made them feel uncomfortable, show that you are willing to listen
	• Follows simple directions of what to do if in danger	B	
	• Gives their name and address	B	
	• Washes hands before and after eating	B	
	• Uses the toilet on their own	A	

A stimulation programme consists of ideas, resources and activities on how to facilitate growth and development in children. A stimulation programme that follows an integrated approach ensures that the education and care needs are emphasised in the daily, weekly, and monthly plans of the programme.

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SECTION 4: POINTERS TO DEVELOPING EARLY CHILDHOOD STIMULATION PROGRAMMES

Definition

This document defines early childhood stimulation programmes as planned and organised units of information and activities that should be done by adults in care and education environments, to enable children (birth to four years) to acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for holistic growth and development.

A stimulation programme consists of ideas, resources and activities on how to facilitate growth and development in children. A stimulation programme that follows an integrated approach ensures that the education and care needs are emphasised in the daily, weekly, and monthly plans of the programme.

Types of programmes

ECD stimulation programmes can be conceptualised in different ways. Common characteristics should include:

- Provision of a summary of the developmental needs of children of different ages in the programme.
- Adult responsibilities that are targeted at stimulating children's growth and development.
- Adult training to help develop an understanding of child development and the reasons for providing stimulating activities.
- Information on how to acquire and make resources for different stages of development and growth.
- Information on safety, referral contacts for various child-related services and other relevant information.
- Methodology or strategies of programme implementation which are clearly linked to the setting, e.g. family, home, and institutional.

Planning a stimulation programme

Several factors need to be taken into account when developing a stimulation programme to ensure that it is of high quality and that it addresses all relevant components of children's needs. Some factors to consider are:

- Curriculum guidelines inform the programme development process.
- The programme is a guide to help caregivers plan and carry out daily, weekly and monthly plans.
- Stimulation programmes should not be rigid. They can be changed and adapted to cater for the children's social and environmental contexts. This flexibility will ensure that the circumstances and individual needs of children are taken into account.
- Desired results, indicators and specific competencies of the children that you are working with or caring for must be made clear at the start of the development of the programme.
- The desired results, indicators and specific competencies outlined in Section 3 of this document can be used as a guide to programme development.
- A child-centred approach will help to build independence and self-driven engagement and experimentation in children.
- The programme should be play-based as children grow and develop through different types and forms of play. A range of play equipment and resources for children to engage with to help their development should be provided.
- The age of children and their capabilities must be taken into account to ensure relevant and age-appropriate activities and resources.

Section 4 of this document on desired results provides examples of activities for different child development domains. These can be used as guides when planning programmes of activities. A range of stimulating, safe and age-appropriate activities can be provided for children to allow them to make choices and foster their enjoyment of exploring and experimenting. Adults have an important role to play as they support young children when necessary, at times providing guidance and at other times providing encouragement. Factors to consider when planning children's activities:

- The attention span of young children is usually quite short.
- Children need a variety of play experiences every day.
- Activities must be child-centred with adults available to provide guidance and support.
- Activities should cater for children's individual needs.

The general purpose of screening is to identify problems with children who are not meeting developmental milestones and desired behaviour patterns. Special programmes of support can then be planned to help address the growth or development need.

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Assessment in early childhood is conducted using mainly the observation technique to gather information about the following aspects in a child:

- their progress
- their abilities
- their interests
- their understanding
- their difficulties
- their skills in specific areas of growth and development.

In institutional settings, a range of tools can be designed to collect and tabulate the information gathered about a child. The information collected can be used for various purposes, such as to:

- prepare progress reports on a child
- inform parents about certain observations in a child's growth and development process which they need to be content or concerned about
- promote learning and development
- identify children with health and/or special needs
- monitor and evaluate early childhood programmes and services.

Principles of assessment and observation

- Assessment of young children is ongoing.
- Information gathered through assessment should be used to inform the programme.
- Assessment considers children's development, their overall experiences and home background.
- Critical decisions about assessment results involving a particular child should be supported by the findings from several observations over time.

Screening

The general purpose of screening is to identify problems with children who are not meeting developmental milestones and desired behaviour patterns. Special programmes of support can then be planned to help address the growth or development need.

Assessment in family home settings

Parents and caregivers in the home conduct assessment of their children informally through unplanned observation of the child's growth and development to see whether the child is progressing well or not. As they interact and relate with the child, parents and caregivers may sometimes come across worrying behaviour patterns or physical conditions. The observations may require immediate specialist attention, or parents or caregivers need to plan specific activities in order to help the child correct or improve the particular aspect of development concerned.

The Department of Education would like to continue the discussions started during the validation process. In order to do this, an invitation is extended to all who use the document to send comments on its usefulness, as well as to make recommendations for additions or changes.

CONCLUSION

The National Early Learning and Development Standards are the first steps to addressing the need for guidance in the curriculum needs of the birth to four age cohort of ECD in the country. It is hoped that this document, which has introduced some expected early learning standards for the very young, will be used effectively to their benefit. Clearly the document is not exhaustive and specific in developmental expectations, but it provides sufficient of the relevant development expectations from which the various uses stated in the beginning can be applied.

To validate this document, comments and suggestions for changes were invited from parents, practitioners, NGO specialists, university staff, national and provincial Department of Health officials. As many comments and suggestions were incorporated into the document as possible. The document is now available for those developing early learning curriculum and other resources for different contexts such as training. The Department of Education would like to continue the discussions started during the validation process. In order to do this, an invitation is extended to all who use the document to send comments on its usefulness, as well as to make recommendations for additions or changes. In this way, the document can become part of the discussions around the challenges of working with children birth to four years and the need to lay a strong foundation for future generations of South Africans.

Send comments, recommendations and changes to:

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