

Approaches to Learning

Approaches to Learning describes how children engage with people, materials, ideas, routines, and challenges. From birth through age five, children are developing:

- Curiosity
- Creativity
- Initiative
- Attention
- Persistence
- Flexible thinking
- Memory
- Problem-solving
- The ability to manage emotions and behavior

These skills grow through relationships, play, exploration, everyday routines, problem-solving, and opportunities to make choices, try new strategies, and try again. Children develop approaches to learning at different rates and in different ways. Children may show these skills through:

- Movement
- Play
- Facial expressions
- Gestures
- Home language(s)
- Signs
- Spoken words
- Assistive communication (ACC)
- Sensory exploration
- Quiet observation
- Persistence
- Active participation

Children's temperament, language, abilities, sensory needs, family practices, relationships, communities, lived experiences, and past opportunities all shape how they explore, attend, persist, regulate, solve problems, and express ideas.

Inside This Learning and Development Area

This area includes four strands and 13 learning goals. The table below highlights what children are learning in this area and how adults can support that learning through warm relationships, responsive interactions, everyday routines, play, and meaningful experiences.

Strand	Children are learning to...	Adults support learning by...
Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation	Manage emotions, behavior, attention, actions, and participation with support.	Creating predictable routines, offering co-regulation, modeling strategies, and helping children practice safe and flexible responses.
Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)	Focus attention, remember information, be flexible in strategies, control impulses, and use thinking skills to solve problems and reach goals.	Reducing distractions, giving clear cues, using visuals or gestures, repeating information, offering time to process and respond, and supporting children without taking over.
Initiative and Curiosity	Show interest, ask questions, make choices, explore materials and ideas, try new experiences, and stick with challenges.	Noticing children's interests, offering meaningful choices, encouraging effort, providing open-ended materials, and inviting children to wonder, investigate, make plans, and try strategies.
Creativity	Express imagination, flexible thinking, and ideas through movement, materials, pretend play, stories, art, music, and other modes of expression.	Providing time, space, materials, stories, music, movement, pretend play, and opportunities to create, revise, and share ideas.

Play Across Approaches to Learning

The play continuum shows how children build approaches to learning through a balance of child-directed, shared, and adult-supported play experiences. Across the continuum, children have opportunities to explore, focus, persist, imagine, create, solve problems, adapt, make choices, and see themselves as active learners.



In Focus: Understanding Self-Regulation, Cognitive Control, and Executive Function

Self-regulation, cognitive control, and executive function are closely connected, but they are not the same. Understanding the differences can help adults recognize what children are practicing and provide support that matches the situation, setting, and child. These terms are used throughout Approaches to Learning to describe related but different parts of how children manage their thinking, behavior, and emotions across contexts.

Self-regulation is a broad term for the ways children manage their emotions, behavior, attention, and thinking so they can participate in relationships, routines, play, and learning. In early childhood, self-regulation develops through warm relationships, co-regulation with adults, predictable routines, play, and repeated opportunities to practice.

Behavioral self-regulation refers to how children manage actions, words, and behavior in everyday situations. This may include waiting, taking turns, using safe actions, following familiar routines, responding to adult cues, and choosing words or actions that fit the situation.

Emotion regulation refers to how children experience, express, and manage feelings. Young children first rely on adults for comfort and co-regulation. Over time, they begin to use familiar strategies such as seeking help, taking space, breathing, using words, movement, sensory supports, or reconnecting with a trusted adult.

Cognitive control refers to the thinking skills children use to organize their thoughts and actions in line with a goal. These processes help children attend to what matters, shift attention when needed, keep rules or information in mind, resist distractions, stop themselves from a first or automatic response, and choose a response that fits the task. Cognitive control is closely related to executive function and is especially important for learning, problem-solving, and later academic skills.

Executive function refers to a set of attention-regulation skills that help children sustain attention, keep goals and information in mind, pause before responding, resist distraction, tolerate frustration, consider consequences, reflect on past experiences, and plan for what comes next. Executive function includes skills such as working memory, flexible thinking, attention control, and control over their first or automatic responses. These skills support — but are not the same as — emotion regulation and behavioral self-regulation.

Why this difference matters: A child may follow rules, avoid outbursts, or appear “well-behaved” while still needing support with cognitive control skills such as remembering directions, shifting attention, resisting distractions, holding information in mind, or using a new rule. Looking separately at behavioral regulation, emotion regulation, and cognitive control helps adults notice a fuller range of children’s strengths and support needs.

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 1. Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation****Goal 1. Child manages actions, words, and behavior with support as needed.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Calms in response to attentive caregiving when needs are met.	Looks to familiar adults for guidance and assistance in managing actions and behavior.	Begins to manage actions and behavior during peer conflict by using words or simple strategies with adult support.	Manages actions, words, and behavior with frequent adult support.	Manages actions, words, and behavior with occasional adult support.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Quiets, relaxes, or settles when a familiar adult holds, rocks, feeds, talks to, or comforts them. • Turns toward a familiar voice, touch, or caregiving routine when upset or distressed. • Shows signs of calming, such as slower movement, softer crying, relaxed posture, or increased comfort when needs are met.	• Looks to, reaches for, or moves toward a familiar adult for reassurance or help when upset, uncertain, frustrated, or in conflict. • Pauses, changes behavior, or accepts comfort or redirection in response to an adult's words, gestures, or tone, or familiar routines. • Uses simple self-calming actions, such as holding a comfort item, sucking fingers, moving close to an adult, or seeking a familiar routine.	• Uses simple words, signs, gestures, or visuals such as "stop," "mine," "help," or "my turn" during conflict or frustration. • Seeks adult help or communicates basic needs, such as hunger, tiredness, wanting space, or needing help to stay engaged. • Begins to pause or use a familiar calming strategy, such as taking space, holding a comfort object, moving to a quiet area, or using a visual support, with adult help.	• Uses reminders, prompts, or cues to choose gentle touches, safe bodies, respectful words, or familiar behavior expectations during play and routines. • Uses simple calming strategies with support, such as taking a breath, asking for help, moving to a quiet space, or using a comfort or sensory support. • Begins to repair interactions after adult support, such as trying again with words, rejoining play, or using simple self-talk like "stop," "wait," "gentle hands," or "ask for help."	• Follows expectations for words, actions, and behavior in familiar settings with occasional reminders or support. • Uses strategies such as waiting, asking for help, taking a breath, taking space, using words, visual cues, or familiar phrases to manage frustration or guide behavior. • Recovers from disappointment, conflict, or frustration and returns to play, routines, or peer interaction with support as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Respond promptly with warm, predictable caregiving, soothing routines, and co-regulation. • Watch for cues of hunger, discomfort, overstimulation, tiredness, frustration, or need for space, and adjust support before children grow more distressed. • Use simple words, gestures, signs, visuals, home-language supports, and routines to help children know what is happening and what they can do. • Stay close during challenging moments, peer conflict, or redirection and offer calm guidance, reassurance, and support. • Model simple ways to ask for help, communicate needs, calm, and participate safely using words, signs, gestures, visuals, comfort objects, quiet spaces, or sensory supports.			• Give clear reminders about expected words, actions, and behavior across play, routines, transitions, meals, group times, cleanup, and outdoor play. • Teach and model strategies during calm moments, such as asking for help, breathing, self-talk, visual cues, or moving to a quiet space. • During intense emotions, first provide safety, calm presence, and co-regulation; later revisit what happened and what to try next. • Support peer conflict with coaching, visual cues, respectful language, accessible options, and practice using safer responses. • Offer limited choices and adapt pacing, routines, and supports to match children's regulation, communication, sensory, background, and relational needs.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 1. Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation****Goal 2. Child manages feelings and emotions with support as needed.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Seeks comfort, focus, and shared joy with familiar adults and shows trust during separation.	Seeks closeness, makes contact with, or looks to familiar adults for help with strong emotions.	Uses strategies to manage strong emotions with adult support.	Uses familiar strategies for less intense emotions and seeks adult support for stronger emotions.	Uses an expanding range of strategies to manage emotions with support as needed.
Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors				
• Turns toward, reaches for, or settles with a familiar adult for comfort, reassurance, or shared attention. • Engages in back-and-forth interactions with familiar adults through cues such as facial expression, movement, vocalization, calming, stilling, or turning toward the adult. • Calms more easily with a familiar adult’s touch, voice, presence, or familiar comforting routine.	• Moves toward, reaches for, or stays close to a familiar adult when upset, tired, overwhelmed, or uncertain. • Accepts comfort through holding, touch, voice, proximity, a comfort item, or a familiar routine. • Recovers more easily from distress with help from a familiar adult.	• Seeks a familiar adult, comfort item, quiet space, sensory support, or familiar routine when upset or overwhelmed. • Uses simple strategies such as covering ears, taking space, hugging a familiar object, asking for help, or using words, signs, or gestures to show feelings or needs. • Calms with adult coaching and returns to play, routines, or shared activity after distress.	• Uses simple strategies during mild frustration, such as pausing, trying again, taking a breath, taking space, moving, or using words, with support available as needed. • Expresses feelings or needs in less intense situations and seeks adult support when emotions become stronger or harder to manage. • Accepts adult coaching and uses familiar calming strategies during more intense moments, including when group participation becomes difficult.	• Uses a variety of strategies such as talking, taking a break, breathing, movement, seeking comfort, or trying again to manage emotions. • Chooses familiar strategies in everyday situations with support that matches the child, context, and intensity of the emotion. • Seeks adult support for more intense emotions and re-engages after frustration, disappointment, or conflict with support as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Provide warm, responsive caregiving throughout routines, play, transitions, and separations so children experience comfort, trust, and connection. • Stay emotionally available and respond calmly to children’s cues for comfort, connection, shared attention, distress, tiredness, or overwhelm. • Offer comfort through touch, voice, presence, familiar routines, comfort objects, quiet spaces, or sensory supports based on the child’s cues and family practices. • Create repeated opportunities for joyful back-and-forth interactions, such as songs, facial play, gentle games, book sharing, and familiar routines. • Offer simple feeling words as possibilities, rather than telling children how they feel, and support children in asking for help, space, or comfort using words, signs, gestures, visuals, AAC, or other communication supports. • Stay close during distress, offer co-regulation, and guide children back to play, routines, or shared activity when they are ready.			• Teach and practice calming and coping strategies during everyday routines, play, problem-solving, and calm moments before children are likely to need them. • Encourage children to use familiar strategies such as breathing, taking space, movement, sensory tools, asking for help, or using words while staying available to support as needed. • During strong emotions, provide safety, calm presence, and co-regulation before asking questions, correcting behavior, or problem-solving. • Use stories, read-alouds, role play, and discussion to explore feelings, behaviors, and strategies for re-engaging safely. • Create environments and relationships that support emotional safety, responsive calming routines, sensory needs, and accessible participation.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 1. Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation****Goal 3. Child appropriately handles and takes care of available materials.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Early exploration and adult guidance help children learn how to use and care for materials. Children begin by exploring objects with their senses and using materials in simple, repeated ways. Over time, they use materials with more purpose and adult support. These skills help children participate in routines, handle materials safely, and care for shared materials in ways that match the child and setting.			Begins to practice handling and caring for toys and materials appropriately with adult support.	Usually handles and cares for toys and materials appropriately with adult support.
			Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors	
			• Uses toys and materials for their intended purpose with reminders and adult support. • Carries, uses, cleans up, or returns toys, tools, and supplies to familiar places with prompts or visual cues. • Responds to adult guidance about how to handle, share, clean up, or care for materials.	• Uses and cares for toys and materials appropriately in most situations during play, work, routines, and cleanup. • Returns materials to the correct place and adjusts use of materials after brief reminders or cues. • Helps care for shared materials and spaces, and may remind peers how to use, share, return, or care for materials respectfully.
			Examples of Supportive Strategies	
			• Model how to use, carry, clean up, store, share, and care for materials during play, routines, and cleanup. • Use clear reminders, consistent language, visual labels, and predictable storage systems so children know where materials belong and how to care for them. • Organize materials so children can access, use, return, and help care for them with support as needed. • Prompt children to notice when materials or shared spaces need cleanup, repair, organizing, or careful handling. • Acknowledge children’s efforts to use and care for materials responsibly, including when they help peers remember routines in respectful and welcoming ways.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 1. Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation****Goal 4. Child follows rules and routines and develops responsibility with support as needed.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Consistent routines and responsive caregiving help children begin to know what comes next and take part in daily activities. At first, adults guide children through simple expectations and routines. Over time, children begin to follow familiar routines with support. These skills build the foundation for self-regulation, shared responsibility, and participation in group settings in preschool.			Follows simple rules and routines with adult support.	Usually follows rules and routines with occasional reminders from adults.
			Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors	
			• Follows simple rules when reminded by an adult. • Participates in familiar routines, such as cleanup, lining up, or washing hands, with support. • Responds to adult prompts or familiar cues about what to do next.	• Follows familiar rules and routines in most situations with reminders as needed. • Moves through multi-step routines, such as cleanup, handwashing, or lining up, using familiar cues, visuals, peer support, or adult support as needed. • Adjusts behavior to fit different expectations and begins preparing for what comes next in familiar routines.
			Examples of Supportive Strategies	
			• Teach rules, routines, and responsibility through modeling, repetition, practice, visual schedules, songs, gestures, and cues. • Break routines into simple steps and guide children through them with consistent, warm reminders. • Maintain predictable rules, routines, and expectations across the day. • Use visual supports and routine cues to help children participate, remember what comes next, complete routines, and show responsibility with support as needed. • Acknowledge children’s participation, follow-through, responsibility, and efforts to follow rules and routines.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 2. Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)****Goal 1. Child maintains focus and sustains attention with support as needed.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Focuses on important people, objects, or tasks with adult support and begins to ignore distractions.	Shows growing ability to focus on people, objects, and activities, including movement, music, and visual cues, to continue or complete an activity or join others in common focus.	Participates in activities and experiences for longer periods of time, especially those that require attention and common focus.	Focuses attention on tasks and experiences for short periods of time with adult support, even with interruptions or distractions.	Focuses attention on tasks and experiences for longer periods of time with growing self-regulation and support as needed, even with interruptions or distractions.
Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors				
• Notices or turns toward a change in sight, sound, movement, voice, or touch. • Looks toward a familiar person, voice, object, toy, face, or movement during interaction. • Briefly attends to a song, book, simple activity, or shared focus with adult support.	• Attends to a song, movement activity, simple game, book, toy, or object for short periods. • Follows an adult’s gestures, words, or visual cues to maintain attention during shared activities. • Returns attention to an activity after a brief distraction with adult guidance.	• Engages in play with materials such as blocks and puzzles, pretend play, or repeated exploration for several minutes. • Participates in familiar routines or shared activities such as songs, story time, cooking, movement activities, or group routines. • Returns to an activity or continues a task after attention shifts, with reminders or adult guidance.	• Stays engaged in activities such as drawing, building, dramatic play, story time, or group discussion for short periods. • Follows multi-step directions during familiar routines or activities with adult support. • Returns attention to a task after distraction and persists in completing simple tasks or activities with reminders.	• Sustains attention on activities such as drawing, building, problem-solving, group discussions, or shared projects for longer periods. • Follows multi-step directions and completes tasks with support, cues, or reminders as needed. • Returns to unfinished activities and persists when challenges arise using familiar cues, visual reminders, or brief adult support.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Provide warm, responsive caregiving and predictable routines that help children feel regulated, connected, and ready to attend. • Offer engaging materials, songs, books, movement activities, and simple games that invite shared attention, exploration, and repeated use. • Follow children’s interests, narrate their actions, and use gestures, words, signs, visuals, or cues to guide and extend focus. • Reduce distractions and organize spaces so children can see, hear, move, and attend to people, objects, and activities. • Use gentle reminders, familiar routines, and adult support to help children return attention after distraction or continue an activity.			• Provide clear expectations, visual or verbal reminders, and manageable steps to help children begin, continue, and return to activities. • Adjust activity length, pacing, materials, and expectations based on children’s attention, participation, sensory needs, and regulation. • Offer a balance of active, quiet, social, individual, teacher-guided, and child-initiated experiences across the day. • Support sustained play, projects, and task completion by modeling persistence, acknowledging effort, and helping children use available supports such as visuals, peers, routines, or adults. • Use different ways for children to take part, such as movement, hands-on exploration, drawing, partner talk, outdoor activity, or quiet reflection, to support attention and participation.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 2. Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)****Goal 2. Child shows flexibility in actions, thinking, and behavior.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Uses trial and error and sometimes tries different approaches to solve problems or interact with others.	Changes focus in order to attend to something else, participate in a new activity, or try a new approach to solving a problem.	Adjusts actions and behavior in social situations, problem-solving, and daily routines when asked.	Changes thinking or behavior with adult support by trying a new way when the first approach does not work.	Shows flexibility in thinking and behavior and responds to adult suggestions by trying new ways to approach tasks or solve problems.

Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors

• Repeats actions, such as kicking, shaking, banging, or reaching, to see what happens. • Tries more than one way to reach, grasp, activate, or interact with a toy, object, or adult. • Watches the result of an action and tries again in a similar or slightly different way.	• Shifts attention from one toy, person, or activity to another with adult support. • Stops one approach and tries a different action when a first attempt does not work. • Joins a new song, game, routine, or activity after watching others or following adult cues.	• Uses adult support to pause and try another approach in social situations, problem-solving, and daily routines. • Tries a different way to solve a simple problem after a suggestion, such as using different materials, roles, movements, or tools. • Follows cues to stop one activity, begin another, or move through a routine or transition with support as needed.	• Tries a different strategy after adult prompting when a first attempt does not work. • Changes plans in play, routines, or problem-solving with support, such as using different materials, roles, movements, or spaces. • Uses adult cues to adjust behavior, rethink an approach, or move to a new activity so participation can continue.	• Tries a different strategy after noticing a problem, using an adult suggestion, or tries a familiar approach. • Adjusts behavior for the needs of a group, such as waiting, taking turns, changing roles, or sharing materials during play or collaborative work. • Moves between activities, expectations, or preferred tasks with familiar cues, support for frustration as needed, and growing flexibility.
--	---	--	--	--

Examples of Supportive Strategies

• Provide safe, interesting materials that respond to children’s actions in different ways and invite repeated exploration, trial and error, and more than one approach. • Notice and narrate children’s attempts, changes in action, and results, such as “You tried again” or “That worked differently.” • Use gestures, pictures, songs, home language cues, brief words, and predictable routines to help children shift attention, try something new, or move through transitions. • Model trying another way when a child becomes stuck, and offer simple choices or materials that can be used in more than one way. • Stay close during changes in routines, peer interactions, and problem-solving moments, offering reassurance, adaptations, and support so children can participate successfully.	• Encourage children to pause, consider another way, and try a new strategy when they get stuck. • Ask guiding questions such as “What else could you try?” or “What could work better here?” while offering support as needed. • Model calm problem-solving and flexible thinking using varied materials, outdoor experiences, familiar play themes, and open-ended tasks with more than one approach. • Prepare children for transitions and changes using visual cues, first-then language, timers, songs, choices, brief warnings, or plans for returning to preferred activities. • Support flexible behavior in group settings by modeling turn-taking, compromise, shared problem-solving, and respectful ways to revise plans or roles.
---	---

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)

Strand 2. Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)

Goal 2. Child shows flexibility in actions, thinking, and behavior.

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
			• Acknowledge the effort children use when they revise a plan, try another strategy, adapt behavior, or stay with a challenge.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 2. Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)****Goal 3. Child shows persistence in actions and tasks.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Shows interest in people and objects and stays engaged with familiar adults or toys for longer periods.	Repeats actions or communication attempts to solve problems even when experiencing challenges.	Stays engaged while solving problems, practicing skills, and trying different strategies to reach a goal.	Persists on preferred tasks when facing small challenges with support as needed.	Persists on preferred tasks and sometimes continues less preferred activities with support as needed.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Looks at, reaches for, or explores a familiar toy, object, or person for more than a brief moment. • Stays engaged in back-and-forth interaction with a familiar adult through looking, smiling, vocalizing, or moving. • Repeats actions with a toy, object, or familiar adult to continue an enjoyable interaction or experience.	• Repeats sounds, gestures, or actions to get help, attention, or a desired object. • Tries again when a first attempt to reach, open, fit, or use something does not work. • Persists in trying to communicate a need or want when not understood right away.	• Continues working on a task or problem for several minutes with support as needed. • Tries more than one strategy when an initial attempt does not work. • Returns to a task after a brief pause or interruption and keeps working toward a goal, such as building, fitting, opening, or completing something.	• Keeps working on a preferred activity when a small problem or setback occurs. • Accepts support and tries again when materials fall, shift, spill, or do not work as expected. • Stays with a preferred task long enough to make adjustments, corrections, or progress toward their goal.	• Stays with preferred activities until a goal is reached or the task feels complete. • Continues less preferred tasks, such as cleanup or routine responsibilities, with support, reminders, or familiar strategies as needed. • Returns to finish a task after a pause, cue, or interruption and shows growing ability to complete tasks chosen by an adult.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Follow children's interests and stay engaged in back-and-forth interactions that invite repeated exploration, communication, and problem-solving. • Provide familiar toys, objects, routines, and manageable challenges that encourage trial and error, repeated attempts, and more than one approach. • Give children time to try again while staying available to offer a hint, model another strategy, or provide support before frustration escalates. • Narrate effort, practice, and persistence, such as "You're trying again," while acknowledging attempts rather than only success. • Break challenging tasks into smaller steps, keep the overall goal clear, and stay nearby to coach children through frustration without taking over.			• Provide preferred and less preferred activities with small, manageable challenges and enough time for children to continue, adjust, and finish. • Offer prompts, brief support, or self-talk models that help children keep going without removing the challenge. • Use clear expectations, routines, and visual cues to help children follow through on responsibilities and return to unfinished tasks. • Encourage children to use simple strategies such as trying another way, breaking a task into steps, checking what comes next, or asking for help. • Offer specific feedback that names effort, practice, strategy use, persistence, and completion, especially during challenging or less preferred activities.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)

Strand 2. Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)

Goal 4. Child shows an increasing ability to control impulses to meet goals.

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Early co-regulation, shared attention, and simple rule-based play help children begin to pause before acting and respond to cues. Over time, children learn to keep a goal or rule in mind. They begin to stop and think before responding and focus on the information they need for the task.			Pauses and uses adult cues or simple rules to choose a response that fits a goal.	Uses familiar rules, cues, and strategies to control impulses needed for a goal, with support as needed.
			Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors	
			• Pauses before responding during a game, routine, or task when an adult gives a cue. • Uses adult cues to wait for a signal, take a turn, follow a simple rule, or choose safer actions. • Tries again after a cue when an automatic response does not fit the task, rule, or goal.	• Waits for a cue, rule, or turn before responding in games, routines, or learning activities. • Uses familiar strategies, such as pausing, checking a visual cue, repeating the rule, or using self-talk, to choose a response that fits the goal. • Changes an initial response when it does not fit the rule, goal, or new information.
			Examples of Supportive Strategies	
			• Use simple games, routines, and tasks that help children practice stopping, waiting, turn-taking, remembering a rule, or changing a response based on a cue. • Prepare children for expectations before transitions, routines such as bedtime, group times, high-interest activities, and games using brief reminders, visual cues, gestures, or modeled self-talk. • Stay close during situations that may be challenging and offer calm, immediate support, prompts, or choices that help children pause and choose a response that fits the goal. • Teach and model simple strategies such as waiting, stopping, breathing, asking for help, checking the rule, or using self-talk such as “Stop, check, then choose.” • Acknowledge effort and strategy use when children pause, wait, check the rule, change a first response, or choose a response that fits the goal. • Affirm children’s appropriate reminders to peers about rules and turn-taking while helping them use kind, respectful, and welcoming language.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)

Strand 2. Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)

Goal 5. Child holds information in mind and uses it to perform tasks.

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Early memory, attention, and repeated routines help children begin to hold information in mind for a short time. At first, children rely on immediate cues and adult support. Over time, they remember and follow simple steps. These skills build the foundation for holding information in mind and completing more complex, multi-step tasks in preschool.			Holds small amounts of information in mind to follow simple two-step directions and complete tasks.	Holds increasing amounts of information in mind to complete tasks.
			Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors	
			• Follows simple two-step directions with support. • Remembers what to do next during a familiar routine, task, or short sequence. • Holds one or two pieces of information in mind long enough to complete a simple activity, with reminders as needed.	• Follows directions with more than one step in familiar situations. • Remembers and completes longer sequences during routines, games, stories, or tasks. • Uses remembered information, materials, steps, or expectations to finish a task after a brief delay, with supports as needed.
			Examples of Supportive Strategies	
			• Give short, clear directions using simple language, consistent wording, gestures, pictures, demonstrations, or other communication supports when helpful. • Break tasks into manageable steps while encouraging children to remember or check what comes next. • Provide practice with short sequences during routines, games, songs, repeated readings, and everyday tasks. • Encourage children to repeat directions, talk through steps, use visual supports, or organize materials before beginning a task. • Invite children to recall, retell, or act out familiar sequences, such as what happened first, next, and last, using words, actions, props, pictures, movement, or drawings.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 3. Initiative and Curiosity****Goal 1. Child shows initiative in interactions, experiences, and explorations with support as needed.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Initiates interactions with familiar adults using gestures, actions, or expressions.	Uses gestures or actions to communicate needs, preferences, or requests.	Begins activities and makes choices with growing initiative and support as needed.	Initiates interactions with familiar adults and persists in activities for brief periods with support as needed.	Shows initiative in activities and attempts new skills in different settings, staying engaged for increasing amounts of time with support as needed.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Looks toward a familiar adult and smiles, vocalizes, reaches, moves, or uses facial expressions to begin interaction. • Repeats an action, such as kicking, patting, moving, or vocalizing, to continue a back-and-forth exchange. • Turns toward a familiar adult during routines, play, or caregiving to seek connection, comfort, or shared interaction.	• Gestures to, reaches for, brings, shows, or moves toward people, objects, or places to communicate a want or interest. • Uses gestures, sounds, actions, or simple communication to request help, more, another turn, or a preferred activity. • Shows preferences by accepting, refusing, pushing away, choosing, or initiating familiar routines, games, or shared activities with an adult.	• Chooses materials, toys, activities, or actions within familiar routines, with adult support as needed. • Begins familiar play, activities, or routines using cues, accessible materials, or support as needed. • Approaches others, gathers materials, or uses familiar actions to begin play, a routine, or a shared activity.	• Begins conversations or interactions with familiar adults to share ideas, ask questions, or seek support. • Starts familiar tasks or play activities when a routine, interest, cue, or support helps them get started. • Makes choices about materials, roles, or actions and stays with a preferred or familiar activity for several minutes with support as needed.	• Begins activities in familiar and new settings with support as needed, cues, or encouragement. • Chooses to try a new skill, material, role, or activity during play, routines, or learning experiences. • Seeks needed materials, information, encouragement, or support to continue an activity, try something new, or stay engaged.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Notice and respond promptly to children's gestures, expressions, sounds, movements, requests, refusals, and preferences. • Use warm, predictable back-and-forth interactions during routines, play, songs, social games, and shared book experiences. • Model and name gestures, actions, simple words, signs, visuals, or other communication supports children can use to express interests, needs, choices, or refusals. • Offer meaningful choices throughout the day and honor children's selections when possible, including choices about materials, actions, routines, and participation. • Organize materials and routines so children can see, reach, choose, begin, and use them with support available as needed. • Stay emotionally available as children explore, make choices, take small risks, and return for reassurance, connection, or help.			• Provide time, space, and accessible materials for children to begin tasks, play, conversations, and explorations in ways that fit their preferences and support needs. • Encourage children to share ideas, ask questions, make choices, try new roles or materials, and begin activities across routines and settings. • Offer a small number of meaningful options, usually two and no more than three, so children can make choices without becoming overwhelmed. • Support focused participation with clear expectations, predictable routines, visual cues, peer or adult support, and encouragement as needed. • Notice and name children's initiative, effort, persistence, and willingness to try new things without stepping in unnecessarily or removing needed support.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 3. Initiative and Curiosity****Goal 2. Child shows interest in and curiosity about the world around them.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Shows interest or engagement when exploring people, objects, and experiences.	Approaches new experiences, people, and materials with curiosity and interest.	Participates in new experiences and experiments with materials in different ways.	Seeks out new information and explores new activities with adult support.	Seeks out new information and explores new activities with growing initiative and support as needed.
Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors				
• Shows interest during exploration through individual cues such as looking, listening, reaching, moving, vocalizing, calming, stilling, or turning toward people or objects. • Repeats actions such as kicking, reaching, batting, shaking, or looking to continue an interesting effect. • Turns toward or explores familiar or new sights, sounds, objects, textures, movements, or materials with adult support.	• Moves toward or reaches for new people and explores new objects, toys, or materials with interest. • Explores materials by touching, looking, mouthing, shaking, moving, or using them in different ways. • Shows curiosity by watching, listening, gesturing, exploring interesting objects, or joining routines and activities with adult support.	• Joins new activities, routines, or experiences with interest and support as needed. • Uses materials in more than one way, such as stacking, filling, dumping, sorting, combining, testing, or comparing. • Shows curiosity by asking questions, gesturing to things, seeking more information, or returning to materials and activities to keep exploring.	• Asks questions about how things work, why something happens, or other things the child notices. • Tries new play ideas, materials, tasks, or investigations with adult encouragement and support. • Observes, compares, investigates, or seeks information from adults while exploring materials, events, or experiences.	• Asks questions and seeks information during play, conversation, routines, and learning experiences. • Begins new activities or investigations and tries unfamiliar materials, roles, or tasks with curiosity and support as needed. • Uses observations, prior experiences, adult input, or hands-on exploration to guide continued investigation and learn more.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Notice and respond to children’s individual cues of interest, including quiet looking, stilling, reaching, turning toward, moving, vocalizing, calming, or returning to an object or experience. • Provide safe and interesting materials, sensory experiences, and routines that invite repeated exploration, trial and error, and use in different ways. • Follow children’s interests and cues for continuing, pausing, or ending exploration, and introduce new sights, sounds, textures, people, and experiences gradually with reassurance. • Name what children notice and do, and build on their curiosity with new materials, simple words, gestures, signs, visuals, books, routines, or experiences. • Offer time, space, and open-ended materials for children to try, test, combine, compare, and revisit ideas without rushing to direct or correct.			• Encourage children’s questions with meaningful information, wondering aloud, and prompts that extend thinking. • Provide open-ended materials, varied experiences, and time to investigate questions and pursue interests. • Introduce experiences that build on children’s interests, prior knowledge, experiences, families, routines, and surroundings. • Scaffold exploration by helping children notice, compare, predict, test ideas, gather information, and try again. • Acknowledge curiosity, learning risks, persistence, and efforts to try something new or learn more.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 4. Creativity****Goal 1. Child uses creativity in thinking and communication to support understanding and learning.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Interacts with others in different ways and adjusts actions or expressions based on others' responses.	Uses familiar objects in new ways during play and imaginative activities.	Combines objects or materials in new ways during creative and pretend play.	Expresses creative ideas in words, actions, or artistic activities when prompted by adults.	Expresses creative ideas and actions using words, movement, or artistic materials both with and without prompting from adults.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Uses movement, gestures, sounds, facial expressions, objects, sensory exploration, or repeated actions in new ways during play and interaction. • Changes vocalizations, movements, or expressions in response to an adult's voice, face, or actions. • Pauses, watches, responds, or repeats actions to keep a back-and-forth interaction going with a familiar adult.	• Uses familiar objects in unexpected ways during play, such as pretending, banging, stacking, carrying, or moving them differently. • Tries more than one way to use a common object or familiar material. • Imitates, repeats, or shows interest in playful or imaginative uses of objects seen in others.	• Combines materials, objects, or props in new ways during play. • Uses one object to represent another or creates simple structures, arrangements, or pretend scenarios with available materials. • Changes how materials are used as ideas develop during creative or pretend play.	• Shares an idea, story, pretend plan, or creative response when invited by an adult. • Uses movement, dramatic play, drawing, building, music, materials, or words to express or respond to an idea. • Adds original details to art, play, storytelling, or personally meaningful creations with support.	• Initiates original ideas during art, movement, storytelling, music, building, design, or pretend play. • Uses words, actions, materials, roles, sounds, or movements to show ideas, experiences, or imagination. • Explains, revises, combines, or shares creative ideas with others with support as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Engage children in warm, back-and-forth interactions during routines, play, songs, and caregiving. • Notice, respond to, mirror, and imitate children's changing expressions, sounds, movements, actions, and ideas. • Provide safe, familiar, open-ended objects and materials that can be explored, combined, moved, and used in different ways. • Join children's play by following their ideas, describing what they do, and extending with simple comments, actions, questions, or added materials. • Allow time and space for children to initiate, pause, respond, repeat, experiment, combine materials, and change plans during play.			• Use open-ended prompts that invite children to imagine, create, explain, revise, and extend their ideas. • Offer varied materials and experiences for art, movement, music, storytelling, dramatic play, building, design, and open-ended creative expression. • Encourage multiple ways for children to respond, such as talking, acting, drawing, moving, building, making music, or using materials. • Ask questions and offer support that help children expand ideas without taking over. • Create a supportive environment where originality, experimentation, collaboration, and expression are welcomed and valued.	

Learning and Development Area. Approaches to Learning (ATL)**Strand 4. Creativity****Goal 2. Child uses imagination in play and interactions with others.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Responds to songs, rhymes, playful routines, people, objects, and sounds through attention, movement, facial expressions, sounds, or repeated actions.	Uses sounds, gestures, signs, or words playfully during songs, games, and creative activities.	Uses imagination in pretend play with others and begins to use objects to represent other things.	Uses imagination in play and begins to share creative ideas with others.	Engages in more elaborate imaginative play and stories with others.
Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors				
• Responds to songs, rhymes, playful routines, people, objects, or sounds through attention, movement, facial expressions, sounds, or repeated actions. • Participates in simple back-and-forth games such as peekaboo, imitation play, songs, or playful caregiving routines. • Shows engagement during shared playful experiences, which may include enjoyment, quiet attention, movement, sounds, stilling, or turn-taking.	• Joins in songs, finger plays, movement games, or repetitive routines using sounds, gestures, signs, words, or actions. • Imitates or repeats playful sounds, motions, rhythms, expressions, or simple words during familiar games and routines. • Uses gestures, sounds, movement, or simple communication to continue a favorite game, song, or shared creative routine.	• Uses one object to represent another during pretend play, such as a block for a phone or a cup for a hat. • Acts out familiar experiences with others, such as cooking, caring for babies, driving, or using familiar materials. • Joins other children in simple make-believe play and adds sounds, words, actions, or unexpected uses of materials.	• Creates pretend scenarios and shares ideas about roles, actions, events, or what is being made or imagined. • Uses drawing, building, movement, music, dramatic play, or storytelling to express imaginative ideas. • Adds original details to play, stories, artwork, constructions, or shared imaginative experiences.	• Develops extended pretend play scenarios with roles, materials, settings, actions, or events. • Creates and tells stories with a sequence of ideas, actions, characters, or imagined events. • Works with others to plan, revise, continue, and show imaginative ideas through play, art, movement, music, building, or storytelling.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Provide warm, playful interactions during routines, care, exploration, songs, finger plays, imitation games, and simple turn-taking activities. • Notice and respond to children’s sounds, movements, expressions, attention, gestures, signs, words, and actions as meaningful participation. • Repeat favorite games, songs, and playful routines so children can anticipate, join, and participate more fully. • Offer safe materials, sensory experiences, props, loose parts, and open-ended objects that invite exploration, repeated action, and pretend play. • Join children’s play by following their ideas, modeling simple pretend actions or language, and extending play without taking over.			• Invite children to share ideas during play, art, storytelling, movement, music, building, and dramatic play. • Offer varied materials, time, and space for extended imaginative play, storytelling, construction, and creative expression. • Ask open-ended questions and support children in planning, revising, expanding, and building on one another’s ideas. • Value children’s original ideas and processes more than finished products, and document or revisit stories and play ideas to extend them over time.	