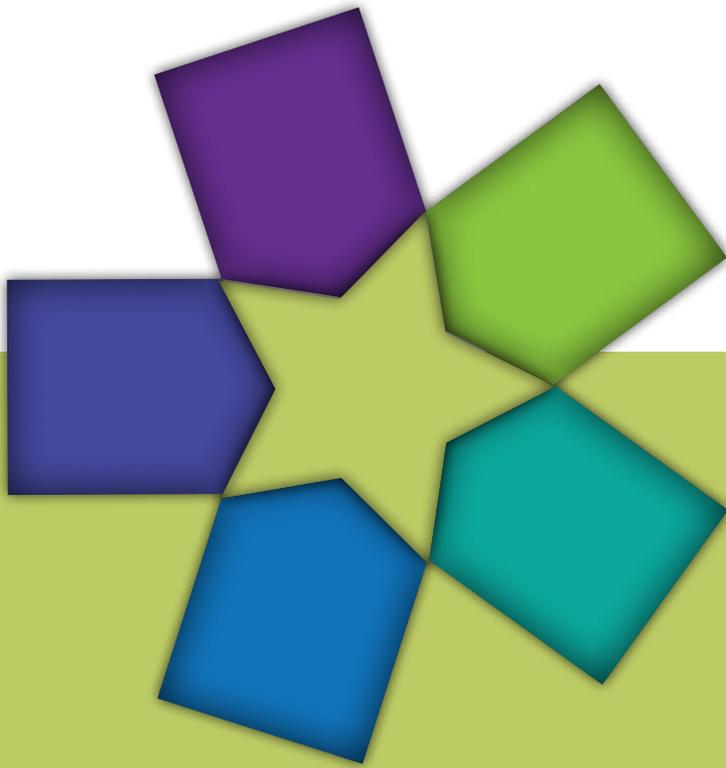


A companion piece to  
**New York State**  
**EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES**



New York Works for  
**children**  
building knowledge • building careers • building futures



# Partners in Early Learning

*a letter to parents and teachers*



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

## Dear Parent and Teacher,

You both want the best start for the one-of-a-kind, amazing young child whose early education is in your hands, at home and school\*. This means working together as partners to support “your” child’s learning and development.

Your relationship shapes your child’s experiences in school. Like any relationship it will take some time to develop. We guarantee there will be moments of shared delight and differences to resolve. But the effort you put into your relationship and working together will benefit “your” child. We say “your” child because for the next year(s), you are both members of the child’s team. Though you play very different roles (there is more about this below), the child needs both of you to work together in her best interest.

Young children have an amazing ability to tune into their important adults. A child will benefit when she sees and feels that you respect each other. It is as if your relationship is a bridge connecting her worlds at home and school. She feels safe and secure. This in turn frees her to explore, experiment and learn.

Because you are both so important to a child, she is always learning from you. Here are some examples, in her words, of what she may have learned from you today:

<b>When you:</b>	<b>A child may be learning:</b>
Smile to share an infant’s pleasure in banging a cardboard box and making a sound.	“It is fun and exciting to learn new things.”
Ask, “Do you want your bottle?” when a toddler says “Ba..ba” and points to the refrigerator. Then give it to her.	“This person listens to me. I am important to her.” “I can get my message across. That makes me want to “talk” more.”
Talk with a preschooler about how her cereal is different after she adds milk.	“An action I take can cause something else to happen.” (cause and effect)
Invite a kindergarten child to add an item to the shopping list by drawing, writing or scribbling.	“ I can be helpful.” “These lines mean ‘milk’. I am a writer. What else can I write?”

(\*Note: We are using the word “school” for any early education setting including child care, family child care, Head Start, family child care, nursery school, pre-K, or kindergarten.)



The more you learn together about a child and how she develops and learns, the better you can support her. The New York State Early Learning Guidelines (The Guidelines) can help. Take a look and you will see they are a list of developmental milestones. They paint a picture of a path of development from birth through age 5 so you can see where a child is today and where she might be months from now. The Guidelines also include some activity ideas to support development and learning at different ages and stages.

As you read this letter, we invite you to talk together about:

- ❖ Who is who in a child's life
- ❖ How young children learn and grow
- ❖ How you can work together to:
  - Share what you know about your child
  - Create connections between home and school
  - Observe to extend your child's learning
  - Respond to challenging behavior in positive ways
- ❖ How to support each other and strengthen your partnership in your child's best interests
- ❖ Show your appreciation and respect for one another
- ❖ Talk about what to do when you disagree – before you disagree

## WHO IS WHO IN A CHILD'S LIFE

As a parent, you are part of your child's life across the years and miles. No one can take your place. Your child trusts you to be there no matter what she does or feels. That is why she can be her happiest, silliest, saddest and angriest with you. (It is also why hellos and goodbyes at the beginning and end of day can sometimes be so emotional.)

Your relationship is a working model for every other relationship in your child's life. When you treat her with kindness and respect, she learns to treat others in that way and to expect the same in return.

Your passion runs deep. This can make it difficult, if not impossible to step back and be objective. It can sometimes pose a challenge when you and a teacher have different views. But this is the way it should be. Every child needs at least one adult who is crazy in love with them.

You know information that is unique to your child. For example, her favorite foods, song, toys and games. You know what scares and frustrates her and how best to comfort her. You know her health history. You also know her latest accomplishments and if there are any changes in her home life.

As a teacher, your role in a child's life is more temporary, though your influence may be lasting. Your relationship is one of the first, major ongoing relationships outside family that deepens a child's understanding of what to expect from other people.

You can be more objective than parents. (Though not when it comes to your own child(ren) if you are a parent.)

The information you bring to your partnership with parents is grounded in your professional education and your experience with children of the same age(s). You know about development: that a toddler will be toilet trained – eventually – and that a preschooler's scribbles are a stage in learning to write. You know about activities to promote learning and how to work with children in a group setting.



### Did you know?

**A baby** who makes marks on a paper is starting to write? (Page 113. Domain V: Language, Communication and Literacy. P: Writing. Alphabet Knowledge.)

**A two year old** who chooses the yellow digger instead of the red fire engine is showing critical thinking skills of comparing, contrasting and evaluating and choosing. (Page 69. Domain IV: Cognition and General Knowledge. B: Critical and Analytic Thinking.)

**A kindergartener** who says, "The sun is out today. I'm happy we can go outside to play," is showing growing ability to observe and describe characteristics of the environment and to express emotions. (Page 80. Domain IV: Cognition and General Knowledge. M: Scientific Knowledge and Page 54. Domain II: Social and Emotional Development. P: Emotional Expression.)

## HOW YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN AND GROW: THE BASICS

Babies are born ready and eager to learn. They are driven to practice and master new skills like rolling over, sitting, walking, writing their names. It is our job, as adults, to fuel their inborn curiosity and desire to learn. You do this when you provide them with:

- ❖ Safe and interesting settings, toys and materials to explore. For example, invite Baili (23 months) to help you measure ingredients to make pancakes.
- ❖ Space and time to explore and discover. For example, give Jorge (5 months) the chance to reach his rattle that has rolled a few inches away.
- ❖ Experiences and props to move learning a step forward. For example, offer Allie who is 4 ½ a pad of paper and pencil so she can take orders in the restaurant she has set up with her friends.

**And most important of all:** A caring trusting relationship with you!

Development follows reasonably predictable patterns. Yet each child develops at their own pace in a way that reveals their own personal interests, strengths, needs and personality.

To help understand the complex process of development, experts have divided it into areas or domains. This allows you to focus on one aspect of a child's development even though in reality they are all interconnected.

### The NYS Early Learning Guidelines: A resource for your work together

The Guidelines can help you work together. They:

- ❖ **Invite you to appreciate how much a child knows and can do.** Appreciating a child leads to respect and even stronger, more positive relationships between you and with the child.
- ❖ **Give you a common language** as you share information and talk about a child's development and learning.
- ❖ **Are a reference you can check out together when you have a question about how children develop and learn.**



# The NYS Early Learning Guidelines: A Resource for Your Work Together

The Guidelines are divided into the following areas or domains of development:

## Domain I

**Physical Well-Being, Health and Motor Development.** Look in this domain if you want to know more about a child's developing:

- ✿ Ability to move and control parts of his body
- ✿ Attitudes and habits that can lead to an active, healthy lifestyle
- ✿ Competence in daily living skills such as dressing and tooth brushing
- ✿ Ability to recognize and try new and healthy foods
- ✿ Awareness of how to stay safe

## Domain II

**Social and Emotional Development.** This domain includes information about a child's developing:

- ✿ Ability to create ongoing relationships with adults and other children
- ✿ Ability to recognize, express and manage their feelings and to understand and respond to the feelings of others

## Domain III

**Approaches to Learning.** This domain focuses on a child's developing:

- ✿ Interest in and desire to learn new information (Curiosity and Interest)
- ✿ Willingness to be involved (Initiative)
- ✿ Ability to remain focused even when distracted or frustrated (Persistence and Attentiveness)
- ✿ Ability to go beyond the concrete to explore and play with ideas (Creativity and Inventiveness)
- ✿ Ability to think about, understand and apply information to new situations (Reflection and Interpretation)

## Domain IV:

**Cognition and General Knowledge.** This domain provides you with information on how children think and what children know about a wide variety of topics including measurement, geography, economics and family.

## Domain V:

**Language, Communication and Literacy.** This domain focuses on a child's growing ability to:

- ✿ Communicate
- ✿ Read
- ✿ Write

## WORKING TOGETHER DAY BY DAY

### Share What You Know

You each know different kinds of information about the child. Sharing that information will give each of you a more complete picture of a child than either of you could have alone.

You will be surprised at how much information you can share in **brief exchanges** over time. For example: At the beginning or end of the day. In a note or by phone or e-mail.

There will also be times you **plan ahead to sit down together to meet**. A program may set a conference schedule, say at the beginning, middle and end of the year. But a conference can happen at any time. Whenever one of you has something about a child's development that you want to discuss about in-depth, arrange a time to sit down, have a cup of coffee and talk together.

### Information to share at the beginning of the year

The beginning of the year is a busy time. Like any big change in life, it can stir up deep feelings for children and adults alike that may include excitement, worry, happiness and sadness.

Sharing information can help you get your child's year off to a safe and good beginning. It will also get your partnership off on the right foot. Here are some key points to share and space for you to add your own ideas:



<b>If you are a parent, it's very helpful if you share your thoughts and information about:</b>	<b>If you are a teacher, share information about you and your program...</b>
- Your hopes and dreams for her in school. What do you hope she experiences and learns? What do you hope to experience and learn?	- Your hopes and goals for what children and families will experience and learn.
- Your home life. Who lives in your home? Do you have pets? How do you and your child spend your weekends?	- A little about yourself. How long have you been teaching? What do you like most about teaching young children? Do you have a child(ren)?
- Your child's health history. Does she have allergies? Take medication?	- Program policies. Opening and closing times. What to do when a child is sick. Permissions for picking a child up, school trips.
- Daily routines. How and when do you feed her? Help her fall asleep?	- Daily routines. How do they work? What do parents need to supply?
- Your child's preferences. What are her favorite foods, toys, games, songs? How does she like to be comforted? Does she have a "lovey" (a stuffed animal or blanket that gives her comfort)?	- A wide variety of ways parents can contribute to their child's experience in school.
- Your child's strengths. Those qualities that make you think, "wow!" such as her sense of humor, persistence, ability to engage with others, response to music ....	- Learning opportunities the program offers during daily routines, indoor and outdoor play, planned activities.
- Questions or worries you may have. Maybe she doesn't sleep through the night, perhaps she has been having wetting accidents or hitting other children.	- Questions you may have about a child's health, routines or behavior.

Here's some space for you to add your own ideas:

parents	teachers

### Information to share day by day

Information you share at the beginning and end of the day, will help you better meet your child's needs –at school and at home. Points to share with each other include:

- ❖ **When did a child last eat and how much?** Knowing if a child is hungry can lead a parent or teacher to offer a snack and/or change mealtime.
- ❖ **How did a child sleep –overnight or during naptime?** Knowing this can lead a parent or teacher to expect possible crankiness and/or to offer quiet time or an early bed or naptime.
- ❖ **Are there changes in a child's life – at home or school?** For example: Is a parent going away on a business trip or deployment? Are Grandparents visiting? Is there a substitute teacher at school? Is there a new class pet? This information allows a parent or teacher to help a child cope with and/or enjoy the change.

### Create Connections Between Home and School

To help make the shift between home and child care easier for your child:

- ❖ Use photos. Hang contact-covered family photos on the wall at childcare and photos of teachers and friends from school on the refrigerator at home.
- ❖ Talk with her about people and events in both places.
- ❖ Play the same music and read the same books in both settings.
- ❖ Let your toddler have her "lovey". It may be a stuffed rabbit or fish. Or a favorite blanket or doll. Transitional objects or "loveys" allow a child to carry the feelings of safety and security of home with her as she settles into school or deals with a rough time. If you start to feel it is getting in the way of her participating in activities, talk together and make a plan with her to keep it in a safe place at school.



### Sharing Information

What information do you have to share about your child?

When, Where and How will you share that information?



### Making Connections

How can you work together to build a bridge between a child's worlds at home and school?

## Concerned About a Child's Development or Behavior?

As you observe children, you can compare what you see a child do to the descriptions of typical milestones for children of that age. Over time, this may lead you to ask, "Is there an issue with this child's development in a certain area?" If the answer seems to be "yes", continue observing. Record your observations. This will give you documentation to refer to in your work together or when you raise the concern with a specialist.

**(Note:** While the Guidelines can alert you to a developmental issue, they are not an assessment or screening tool and should never be used in this way.)



### Observe to Extend Your Child's Learning

Young children are always developing and changing. There is always something new to learn about them. Observing gives you information you need to decide how you can work together to support development and extend learning.

**What is observing?** Observing is watching and listening from the outside to try to understand what your child is experiencing on the inside.

**When and where to observe?** You can observe children any time, at home, at school, indoors and outdoors, during daily routines, playtime and activities you plan.

If you are together, give each other a nod or tap on the shoulder so you can pay attention to the same behavior. If not, share what you saw and talk about it together.

### How to observe?

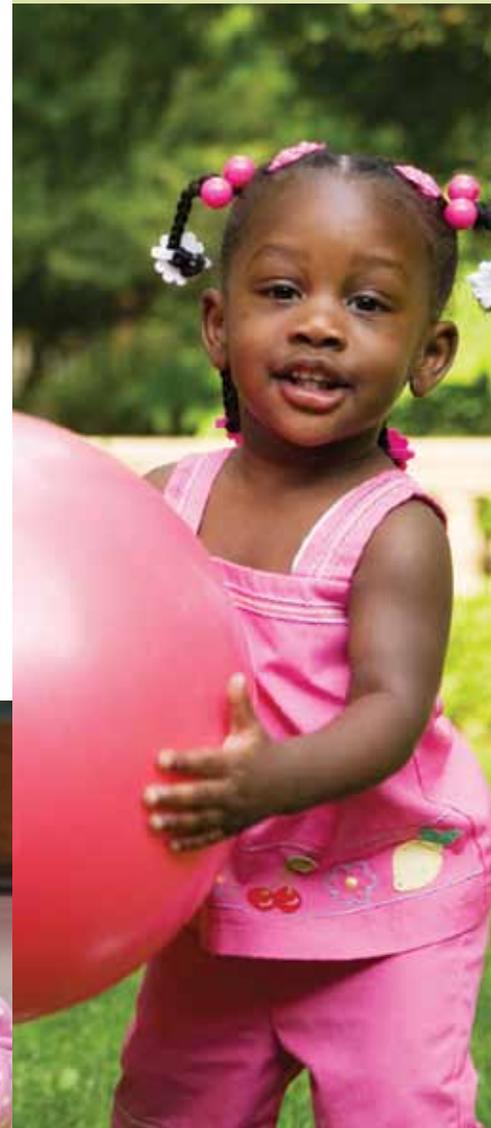
Here are two basic steps to observing:

- ❖ As you watch a child, ask yourself, "What is \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) thinking or learning?"
- ❖ Look for clues to the answer in a child's facial expression, gestures, sounds and words and actions.

### Use what you observe to extend learning

Extending learning means building on what children know and providing an opportunity to move learning a tiny step forward. There are ideas for how to extend learning in the Guidelines. You will come up with others.

When you observe...	You may extend learning in school or at home when you decide to:
<p>Yasvita (7 months) looks then reaches for toys, objects and her bottle with both hands.</p> <p>(Physical Well-Being, Health and Motor Development: D. Fine Motor)</p>	<p><b>Have a conversation:</b> Offer her safe, interesting objects to hold and explore. Sit in the rocking chair with her, talking to her quietly as she enjoys holding on to her bottle during her after-nap snack</p>
<p>Julian (16 months) uses a bucket to carry 4 blocks across the room. (Cognition and General Knowledge: D. Problem-Solving)</p>	<p><b>Help him see himself as a thinker:</b> Say “That was good thinking to carry all those blocks all the way over here in a bucket.”</p>
<p>Kaylee (22 months) smiles as she looks in the mirror, puts on a hat, picks up a pocketbook and looks at you.</p> <p>(Approaches toward Learning: D. Creativity and Inventiveness)</p>	<p><b>Play pretend:</b> Wave “bye-bye” and say, “You are wearing a hat. Are you going to work? I’ll see you when you come back” when she waves bye, then walks across the room. Show your delight as you greet her when she returns.</p>
<p>Jeremy (31 months) uses the toilet -- when you remind him. (Physical well-being, Health and Motor Development: G. Daily Living Skills: Hygiene)</p>	<p><b>Solve a problem together:</b> Gently and respectfully remind him that he hasn’t gone to the toilet for awhile. Offer him your hand and suggest you walk to the bathroom together like you did last time.</p>
<p>Souveyna (42 months) estimates size during a walk in the park when she says, “I’m as tall as this bush” (Cognition and General Knowledge: H. Measurement)</p>	<p><b>Link the new to the familiar:</b> Ask Souveyna to find something in the room that is as tall as she is. Then invite her to draw a picture of herself, then a picture of the object that is the same height.</p>





## Respond to Challenging Behaviors in Positive Ways

Young children need adults to help them learn about what is acceptable behavior and what is not. When you set limits in positive, clear and consistent ways, you help your child learn how to control her own behavior and feelings.

It's easier said than done. Your emotions can run high when your child protests, says “no” repeatedly or hits, bites or pushes another child. The Guidelines can help you have realistic expectations of your child's behavior at different ages. This can make it easier to remember that you are on your child's team.

In the chart below, are three examples of challenging behaviors – in a child's voice -- that are part of typical development. You can see where each is found in the Guidelines.

### Age Range: Birth to 18 months

When I....	I may be telling you...	Ways you can support my development and learning include ...
Arch my back and protest because I don't want to sit in my highchair ( <i>Social and Emotional Development: Social Development L. Self-Concept: Abilities-Preferences</i> )	I don't have the words to tell you that I want to be free to move on my own (to crawl, stand, walk, play). I don't want to be picked up and stuck into that highchair now.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Give me a warning: It's going to be time to go in your highchair in just a few minutes.</li> <li>- Hold me securely so I don't slip out of your arms.</li> <li>- Tell me you understand how I am feeling. Explain that after lunch I can get back down on the floor and play.</li> </ul>

### Age Range: 18 to 36 months

When I...	I am telling you...	Ways you can support my learning include...
Scream “No!” and throw a toy even though you tell me not to ( <i>Social and Emotional Development: Social Development: M. Self-concept</i> )	I am figuring out who I am as a separate person and what I can do. I want to do things my way to a certain point – but I need to you to set some clear limits for me to help me feel safe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Give me plenty of chances to be independent throughout the day. Invite me to help you set the table for snack. Arrange and label toys on shelves so I can choose what I want to play with.</li> <li>- Ask yourself what I am feeling and thinking.</li> <li>- Give me genuine choices about what to wear, eat and do.</li> </ul>

## Age Range: 36 to 60 months

When I...	I may be telling you ...	Ways you can support my development and learning include...
<p>Whine, or push another child or grab a toy when I have to wait for my a turn during group activities (<i>Social and Emotional Development: Social Development: N. Self Control: Feelings and Impulses</i>)</p>	<p>I am learning how to play and be with other children. But sometimes I feel so eager or excited that it can be hard for me to wait my turn. I'll need your help.</p>	<p>Let me know I'm doing a good job when you see me waiting for a turn.</p> <p>Assure me that my turn is coming.</p> <p>Figure out a way to make waiting easier for me (e.g., set a timer, sit with me, tell me when I will be next)</p> <p>Step in if you see me getting frustrated with another child or the situation.</p> <p>Have duplicates of favorite toys and equipment and design activities so none of us have to wait too long.</p>



### Respond to Challenging Behaviors in Positive Ways

Talk together when your child behaves in challenging ways.

- What does the child do?
- What might the child's behavior be telling you? What is she experiencing? Thinking? Learning?
- What can you say and/or do to let her know you are on her side?
- How can you respond to keep her safe and help the child learn to control her own behavior?

## SUPPORT EACH OTHER DAY BY DAY

### Show Your Appreciation and Respect for One Another

When you take a few minutes in your busy days to show your appreciation and respect for one another, you strengthen your relationship and model how people work together for your child. It doesn't take much. Here are some examples of small actions that can make a big difference.

- ❖ Say hello and goodbye to each other at the beginning and end of the day.
- ❖ Help each other out. For example, a parent might help pick up toys with their child at the end of the day. A teacher might label drawers, cabinets, and bins so parents can find things they need such as a cup to get their child a drink or their child's favorite toy.
- ❖ Take care of each other. For example, a parent and child might bring in a flower to put on the snack table. A teacher might offer an exhausted parent a cup of tea or gather a child's belongings so a parent doesn't have to go searching at the end of the day.
- ❖ Be on time for each other. Especially teachers at the beginning of the day and parents at the end of the day.



## Talk About What to Do When You Disagree – Before You Disagree

If parents of the same child disagree, you can count on the fact that you will have disagreements at times. Whether it is over a missing sock, paint on your child's dress, toilet learning, setting limits or something else, having a plan in mind can help you work things out. Here are some steps to follow:

- ❖ **Count on the fact that you will disagree at times.** It's normal when adults who were raised in different families, perhaps in different cultures and at different times, care about and for the same child.
- ❖ **Be aware that your emotions can run high.** Young children have a way of evoking deep feelings –even when you both want the best for them.
- ❖ **Talk together. Try to put what's wrong into words.** For example: "I tried to explain that I don't want Lee to eat sweets but when I walked in she was eating a piece of someone's birthday cake." Or "In a group setting, it is not healthy to not put a diaper on a toddler."
- ❖ **Listen and ask questions.** Try to understand the other person's perspective.
- ❖ **Make a plan.** Agree on steps you will both take and a time to check in with each other about how things are going.
- ❖ **Check in with each other.** Talk about what is working, what isn't.
- ❖ **Refine your plan as needed** and repeat.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Working together is a journey. It takes courage, cooperation and commitment to share your knowledge, observations and questions with one another over time. As your relationship grows stronger, you will continue to learn from each other, your observations and the Guidelines. Your child will continue to learn and grow too feeling safe and secure in the presence of people who have her best interests at heart.

*The ECAC thanks Amy Laura Dombro for her authorship of this booklet.*