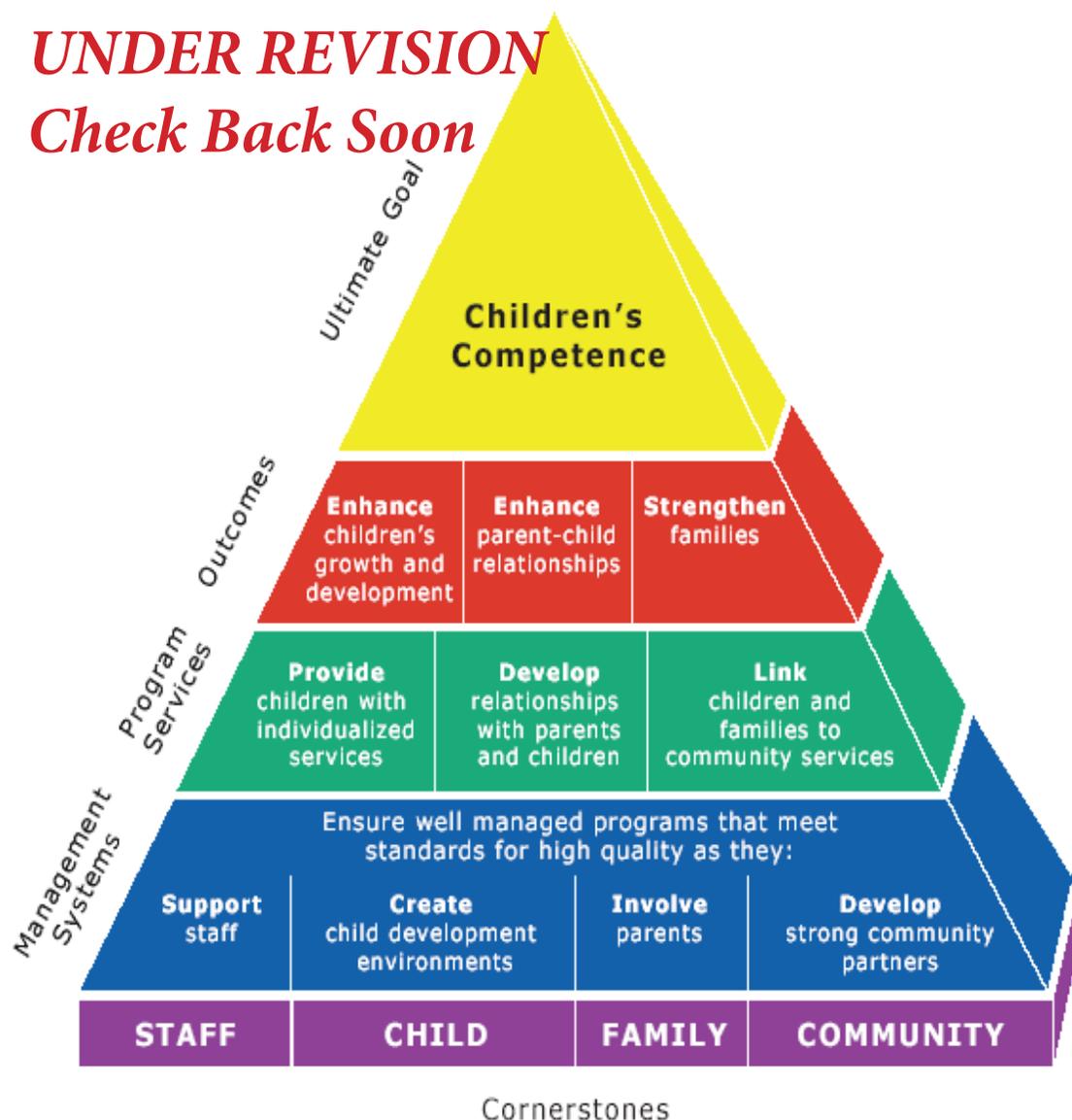


Framework for Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers and Their Families*

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- This conceptual framework reflects the structure programs must develop and implement to support the healthy growth and development of expectant families, babies and toddlers. Strong management systems provide the foundation for implementing comprehensive child development and family support services that lead to positive outcomes for very young children and their families.
- Through the implementation of continuous and comprehensive child development and family support services, program staff builds trusting and respectful relationships with families. Continuity of care integrates the family and their values and beliefs with care giving that is responsive to the individualized needs and interests of each child. Trust and attachment are the context for learning and development in all areas - physical, social, emotional and cognitive.
- Fostering healthy development and secure attachment begins prenatally and continues to influence the developmental competence of very young children throughout the very first years of the baby's life. Communication, self-regulation, and problem solving, developed in the context of trusting relationships and nurturing experiences during the earliest moments and years of a child's life, support the developmental competence of children throughout their school years.

*Source: The Program Performance Measures for Head Start Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers: Research to Practice Brief. Office of Planning and Research Evaluation. 2001-2003. Available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/>

How Do Infant/Toddler Programs Support School Readiness?

All agencies serving infants and toddlers must develop age-appropriate school readiness goals, that “align with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, State early learning guidelines, and the requirements and expectations of the schools, to the extent that they apply to the ages of children, birth to five, participating in the program and at a minimum address the domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development” (45 CFR XIII 1307.3 (b)(1)(ii), as amended).

The Office of Head Start is developing resources and materials to support programs in developing school readiness goals for infants and toddlers, based on the following foundations and principles. There will also be a revised Framework for programs serving infants and toddlers.

FOUNDATIONS FOR EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS

The large body of research on brain development and how babies learn clearly states the importance of learning in the context of relationships. The social and emotional development of young children and the nature of their relationships and attachments are critical to their development. It is through these relationships and interactions with families and other adults that babies and toddlers learn and develop - physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. Intimate, positive, and nurturing daily interactions based on individual and responsive care between babies and primary caregivers set a secure foundation for healthy development in all areas. A trusting attachment among families, babies and toddlers, and caregivers and home visitors supports the babies’ learning in all areas – growth and motor, emotional security and trust, language and communication, self-regulation, and the foundation for cognitive development.

SCHOOL READINESS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

The foundations for early learning are in the daily and routine interactions with babies and toddlers and adults. From research, we know that the development of healthy social and emotional skills in the earliest years is the foundation that supports the development of emerging literacy and numeracy skills. The Head Start Act requires that programs serve infants and toddlers and their families by providing ... “early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services that will enhance the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of participating children” (Sec.645A (b)(1)). So what does this look like? Below are some questions to consider in developing appropriate goals for infants and toddlers in group settings, as well as individual infants and toddlers:

1. Is one primary caregiver assigned to each child in center-based Early Head Start programs? Is there one home visitor assigned long term in the home base program option? Are there limited transitions in the day/week/month/year to ensure continuity of care?
2. Are there written plans for groups of children as well as individual children? Do the plans reflect developmental milestones for each child and progress for reaching those? How are families involved in determining developmental goals? Do plans and daily care practices include family cultural care practices and routines, as best as possible, to implement continuity of care?
3. Do infants and toddlers and their families feel safe and secure within their program setting? Do staff use responsive care-giving practices to engage them?
4. What curriculum is used? Is it rooted in the concept of learning through relationships and routines? What do group and individualized routines look like? Are routines based upon individual needs and preferences?
5. Is there a process of ongoing assessment that includes observations of staff and family, anecdotal records, and planning with staff and families, that documents adaptation of goals based on the baby/toddler progress in development across all areas?

6. Is the environment rich with language so that babies hear words and language describing the array of experiences throughout the day? Do developing toddlers find adults who listen and understand their own budding expressions?

Resource: The Head Start Act, as amended December 12, 2007, gives the following general description of Early Head Start: Sec. 645A. [42 U.S.C. 9840A] (a) IN GENERAL-- The Secretary shall make grants to entities (referred to in this subchapter as Early Head Start agencies) in accordance with this section for programs (referred to in this subchapter as Early Head Start programs) providing family-centered services for low-income families with very young children designed to promote the development of the children, and to enable their parents to fulfill their roles as parents and to move toward self-sufficiency. In addition, this section of the Act goes further to require Head Start programs serving infants and toddlers to provide early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services that will enhance the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of participating children (Sec.645A (b)(1)).