

## CURRICULUM



## EXPLORING YOUR CURRICULUM: A Quick Guide for Teachers and Family Child Care Providers

Every curriculum has its own approach and ways to support children's learning. While many different curricula meet Head Start Program Performance Standard (HSPPS) §1302.32, each curriculum is unique.

Knowing your own curriculum well will help you use it effectively. This quick guide is designed to support teachers and family child care providers to explore the ways a curriculum:

- Describes its approach to teaching and learning
- Addresses learning domains
- Defines learning goals
- Supports the design and organization of the learning environment and daily schedule
- Supports planning and implementing learning experiences
- Supports family engagement

This quick guide also includes a section that provides ideas for how professional development providers can use the quick guide with teachers and family child care providers. It is useful for education leaders such as education managers, child development specialists, coaches, and trainers.



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## USING THE QUICK GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Professional development providers can use this quick guide to help teachers and family child care providers to explore their curriculum. This section provides ideas for how professional development providers, including trainers, education managers, child development specialists, training and technical assistance providers, coaches, and others may use the quick guide in a variety of settings. Teachers and family child care providers can also use the rest of the quick guide on their own.

### WHY USE THE QUICK GUIDE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH TEACHERS AND FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS?

The quick guide is a workbook-like resource designed to support teachers and family child care providers in understanding their curriculum and its intended use. You can use the quick guide with great flexibility when providing professional development in training events, peer learning communities, and coaching sessions. It can be used with new or experienced staff to:

- Introduce or provide training on a new curriculum
- Deepen teachers' and family child care providers' understanding of an existing curriculum
- Provide added support on one aspect of a curriculum, such as learning goals
- Individualize the curriculum to fit the strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds of children in their group, including children with disabilities and other special needs
- Reflect on how teachers' and family child care providers' own knowledge and experience relate to the curriculum

### HOW CAN YOU PREPARE TO USE THE QUICK GUIDE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

First, use the quick guide to explore the curriculum by yourself before using it with teachers or family child care providers. This will deepen your understanding of both the quick guide and the program's curriculum. It will also alert you to the curriculum's strengths and any issues the curriculum may have, such as gaps in learning goals or lack of guidance on culturally and linguistically responsive practices. You can use this information to help you identify relevant supplemental resources that teachers and family child care providers may need.

Once you have reviewed the quick guide, additional steps for preparing for professional development include:

- Learn about teachers' and family child care providers' experience with and knowledge of their curriculum as well as any questions they have about how to use it
- Decide what professional development outcomes you want to achieve based on teachers' and family child care providers' experience with and knowledge of their curriculum, such as supporting teachers to understand the curriculum's approach to teaching and learning or how to use the curriculum's learning goals when planning learning experiences
- Determine the type of professional development that will best achieve the desired outcomes, such as small- or large-group training events, peer learning communities, or practice-based coaching
- Plan how to use the quick guide to achieve your desired outcomes, including whether to focus on the whole quick guide or specific sections of the guide

## SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE QUICK GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### TRAINING EVENTS

The quick guide provides a process for reviewing a curriculum that can be used in small- and large-group training events. The prompts in the quick guide focus on different aspects of the curriculum. They guide participants to consider: What is their curriculum's overall approach? What guidance is provided on curriculum themes or topics? What are its learning goals? What resources and materials does it include? Reflection questions guide participants in thinking about how the curriculum can be used in their own practice.

### PEER LEARNING Communities

A small group of center-based teachers or family child care providers can use the quick guide with a supervisor, peer facilitator, or professional development provider to explore their curriculum and reflect on their own teaching. With this approach, the facilitator encourages participants to share their observations, questions, ideas, and reflections about their curriculum. The facilitator may also act as a resource to answer questions about the curriculum's components (like the teacher's guide and activity cards), provide supplemental materials, and support the teachers or family child care providers in creating individual goals.

This approach is especially well-suited for centers where teachers in multiple classrooms are implementing the same curriculum. Similarly, family child care providers who use the same curriculum can form in-person or online peer learning communities. One or two quick guide topics can be used to guide the discussion at each peer learning communities session. Study group participants can also discuss their responses to the reflection questions. A peer learning community can build a community of learners in which the participants collaboratively deepen their understanding of their curriculum and connect it to their own practices.

### PRACTICE-BASED Coaching

The quick guide can provide a framework for coaches to support teachers and family child care providers in implementing teaching practices promoted by their curriculum. Coaches can use quick guide topic areas to guide their focused observations of teachers and caregivers as they implement their curriculum. The reflection questions can be used to focus teachers and family child care providers on how to use their curriculum's resources to support their practice. For example, teachers and family child care providers may consider how to use their curriculum's daily schedule, its diagrams of how to organize the learning environment, or its learning activities to meet children's interests, strengths, needs, and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

## ABOUT THE QUICK GUIDE

*Welcome! My name is Ana, and I'm a toddler teacher.*

*This quick guide helped me to take a closer look at all my curriculum's resources and better understand how they can support my teaching.*

*Let's see how the quick guide can help you use your curriculum!*



### HOW IS THIS QUICK GUIDE ORGANIZED?

Each section of this quick guide focuses on a specific aspect of your curriculum and includes:

- An early educator's thoughts on exploring her curriculum
- Points to consider when reviewing your curriculum
- Reflection questions on how you will use your curriculum to support your group of children
- Note-taking space to write about your curriculum, your own ideas, or topics you wish to explore more deeply with an education leader, such as an education manager, child development specialist, or coach

### HOW DO I USE THIS QUICK GUIDE?

- Look over the whole quick guide to learn more about it.
- Decide whether to use this quick guide by yourself, with another early educator, with a small group of colleagues, or with an education leader, such as an education manager, child development specialist, or coach.
- Gather all your curriculum's resources, including user guides, activity cards, and children's books. Your education manager or child development specialist may help you find all of the pieces of your curriculum.
- Use this quick guide to explore how you can use your curriculum to:
  - Support children's development in all learning domains
  - Individualize support based on children's interests, strengths, needs, and backgrounds
  - Be culturally and linguistically responsive to children and families
- Take notes on your plans for using your curriculum and any questions you may have.
- Ask an education leader any questions you have about the curriculum, including how to use it to support your group of children.
- Return to this quick guide as needed to reflect on how you are using your curriculum.

## 1. YOUR CURRICULUM'S RESOURCES

*My curriculum includes so many resources! As I look over each one, I can start to see how they fit together to support me in my teaching.*



### Look over each of your curriculum's resources and think about:

- What its purpose is
- Whether you would use it every day, like a teacher's guide, or only sometimes, like activity cards

### Take a closer look at each resource you will use every day and think about:

- How to use it in your daily planning or teaching
- How much flexibility you have in using it
- Whether you would need to adjust it to make it appropriate to use with every child in your group

### Take a look at any curriculum resources that children or families will use, such as picture books, play materials, posters, and family letters, and think about whether:

- The resources reflect the cultures, ethnicities, and languages of the children in your group
- Any resources, like picture books or notes to families about the curriculum, are available in the home or tribal languages of the children and families in your group

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which curriculum resources do you feel comfortable using?
- Would you like more professional development on how to use any of the resources? (An education leader may help you find additional support.)



Notes

## 2. YOUR CURRICULUM'S APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

*My curriculum's introduction explains how important it is to adjust how I use the curriculum to fit the children in my group. I am happy to see that my curriculum's approach encourages me to consider each child's interests, strengths, needs, and cultural and language backgrounds!*



A curriculum's approach to teaching and learning is often described in a special chapter or section with a title like "Introduction," "Guiding Principles," or "Theory and Research." The curriculum's approach guides you in how to use the curriculum to support children's learning and development. For example, in a relationship-based approach, teachers and family child care providers aim to build strong, trusting relationships with children and their families. Another approach is to offer children choices and to build on children's interests when planning learning experiences.

Understanding your curriculum's approach will help you use it effectively. As you read about the approach, think about how your curriculum:

- Describes its approach to teaching and learning
- Helps you be responsive to each child's interests, strengths, needs, and cultural and language backgrounds
- Helps you partner with diverse families, including families who speak languages other than English
- Supports you to individualize for children with identified or suspected disabilities or with other special needs
- Supports you to individualize for children who are dual language learners and for children who are tribal language learners

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you think your curriculum's approach is similar to or different from your own ideas about teaching and learning?
- Does your curriculum's approach include any ideas that are new to you? How might these new ideas help you in your teaching? (You may want to explore any questions you have about the approach with an education leader.)



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### 3. YOUR CURRICULUM'S LEARNING DOMAINS

*I see that my curriculum is organized into learning domains. I will need to use several of its resources to be sure I am planning learning experiences to support children in all learning domains.*



Learning domains are areas of learning and development, such as cognitive development and social development. Your curriculum provides resources that you can use to support children's learning in the domains. These resources may be organized by each learning domain. They may be integrated into daily experiences, learning centers, themes, projects, or specific studies, such as "Insects" or "My Neighborhood."

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) outlines the key areas and expectations for child development and learning in five central domains: Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy, Cognition, and Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development. The *Using the ELOF to Inform Curriculum Planning and Implementation* tool included in the Related Resources section on [page 14](#) supports program leaders in aligning their curriculum with the ELOF

As you explore your curriculum's resources, think about:

- Which learning domains the curriculum covers
- How the curriculum integrates the learning domains in daily routines and learning experiences, learning centers, and in other ways
- How similar your curriculum's learning domains are to the ELOF central domains of learning and development

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do your curriculum's resources help you to support children's learning and development in all learning domains?
- Do you have any questions about how you will use the curriculum resources to support children's learning and development in any of the domains? (You may want to explore any questions you have with an education leader.)



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## 4. YOUR CURRICULUM'S LEARNING GOALS

*My curriculum's learning goals keep me focused on important skills and concepts in different domains. I use these goals, along with ongoing assessment, to individualize for each child.*



Your curriculum may include goals in each of the learning domains. These goals are sometimes called learning goals, objectives, outcomes, or indicators. Your curriculum may link its goals to specific learning experiences or activities in the curriculum. As children participate in these activities, you will support them in reaching these goals.

As you explore your curriculum's resources, think about:

- What your curriculum's learning goals for children are
- How your curriculum's learning experiences are connected to its learning goals
- How you use your curriculum's learning goals and ongoing assessment to individualize learning experiences for each child
- How your curriculum guides you to adapt the curriculum's learning goals for children with identified or suspected disabilities or with other special needs
- How your curriculum guides you to set learning goals in each language that children are learning (in English and in a home language or a tribal language, as appropriate)
- How your curriculum guides you to involve families in the process of setting learning goals

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do you involve families in the process of setting learning goals for children?
- How do you keep track of children's progress toward reaching their learning goals? (You may want to talk with an education leader about ways of tracking children's progress towards learning goals.)



Notes

## 5. YOUR CURRICULUM'S WAYS OF ORGANIZING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

*My curriculum gives me guidance on how to organize my space and materials so that they meet the needs of all the children in my group. My curriculum also gives me the flexibility to rearrange or rotate my materials based on the changes in the children's skills and interests.*



Curricula often suggest particular ways to set up the learning environment. This may include descriptions of learning areas that are indoors (like book, sleeping, and water play areas) or outdoors (like a garden). It may also include lists of learning materials and equipment, such as art materials, manipulatives, books, and gross motor equipment. The curriculum may also suggest ways to organize a learning environment for children of a specific age (such as toddlers) or for children in multi-age groups (such as birth through age five).

As you explore your curriculum's resources and ideas, think about how your curriculum:

- Suggests setting up the learning environment
- Supports children's learning and development in all learning domains through the learning environment, such as through book, block, or sensory areas
- Suggests modifications to the learning environment that meet the needs of all children, including children with identified or suspected disabilities or with other special needs
- Suggests including familiar materials that reflect children's backgrounds and cultures in the learning environment, like family photos or objects from home
- Suggests ways to set up your learning environment to individualize for children who are dual language learners and for children who are tribal language learners, such as providing picture labels and books in home or tribal languages

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What challenges must you meet to organize your setting as the curriculum suggests? For example, how will you address issues of space, size, and shape, or access to water or the outdoor environment? (You may want to explore these challenges with your education leader.)
- How will you use your curriculum's suggestions for organizing the indoor and outdoor learning environments in ways that fit your setting and the children in your group? (You may want to explore any questions about how to do this with an education leader.)



Notes

## 6. YOUR CURRICULUM'S WAYS OF USING ROUTINES AND SCHEDULES

*My curriculum gives me great ideas for how to organize my daily schedule and support children in becoming familiar with it. I use a picture schedule for the children so they know what to expect. We change it sometimes. One day, after it rained, we explored water outside instead of having large group time inside.*



Many curricula offer specific ideas for how to organize the daily schedule and routines. For example, your curriculum may suggest when to schedule group time, outdoor time, and transitions and how to organize routines such as greeting and goodbye rituals, washing hands, eating, diapering, toileting, and napping.

As you explore your curriculum's resources and ideas, think about how your curriculum:

- Helps you to organize the daily schedule and set up routines
- Suggests organizing the daily schedule to support children's learning and development in the different learning domains
- Suggests using routines to support children's learning and development in the different learning domains, such as engaging in language-rich interactions or providing opportunities to develop motor skills during routines
- Helps you to develop schedules and routines that are responsive to individual children's interests and needs, such as time to rock a baby before rest time or additional gross motor time for children who require it
- Helps you to develop schedules and routines that are responsive to children's cultural and language backgrounds, such as using familiar songs during transitions or displaying visuals that all children can understand and use

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How will you use your curriculum to establish predictable routines that provide the children in your group with rich learning experiences?
- How will you use your curriculum to organize a daily schedule that fits the interests, strengths, needs, and backgrounds of the children in your group? (You may want to explore any questions about how to do this with an education leader.)



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## 7. YOUR CURRICULUM'S WAYS OF PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

*My curriculum offers so many different ideas for learning experiences. The sequence helps me choose and provide experiences that best fit the strengths and needs of each child.*



Your curriculum provides ideas for planning and implementing learning experiences that will support children who are at various levels of development to make progress toward learning goals.

As you explore your curriculum's resources and ideas, think about:

- How learning experiences, such as book readings, learning centers, and song and movement activities, are described by your curriculum
- What resources and materials you can use to plan and implement these activities
- How these learning experiences can support goals in all the learning domains, such as how book readings can support language and literacy development
- How the sequence helps you choose experiences and materials that will support each child's ongoing development and learning, including ideas for adapting activities to meet the strengths and needs of children at a range of developmental levels
- How your curriculum helps you to adapt and individualize experiences and materials to meet the strengths and needs of children with identified or suspected disabilities or with other special needs (for example, the curriculum may suggest visual or verbal prompts to assist children who may need additional support to participate in a multi-step activity)
- How your curriculum guides you to learn about and build on each child's existing knowledge (including knowledge developed within each child's family and culture) as you plan and implement learning experiences
- How your curriculum guides you to individualize learning experiences for children who are dual language learners and for children who are tribal language learners

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can you use your curriculum's ideas for learning experiences to support children's learning in all domains?
- What questions do you have about your curriculum's way of planning and implementing learning experiences that are individualized to support each child in your group? (You may want to explore these questions with your education leader.)



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## 8. YOUR CURRICULUM'S WAYS OF ENGAGING FAMILIES

*My curriculum gives me ideas for how to involve families in their children's learning. I have invited families to share stories, sing songs, and read books in their home language. One mother is an artist and leads children in creating beautiful art creations. A grandfather tells stories to a small group of children in Hmong each week.*



Your curriculum may give ideas for engaging families in children's learning. Families may be invited to lead or work with you to support learning experiences. You may ask families to share their children's knowledge and experiences on curriculum related topics. For example, for a unit on transportation, the curriculum may suggest asking families about their and their child's experiences with different forms of transportation, including bikes, cars, trains, subways, boats, or airplanes. Your curriculum may provide notes or materials to share with families, including information about the curriculum, ideas for curriculum-related activities families can do at home, or information about child development.

As you explore the curriculum's resources and ideas, think about:

- What resources your curriculum provides to engage families in planning, leading, and working with you to support learning experiences in your setting
- What resources your curriculum provides to engage families in their children's learning at home
- What ideas your curriculum offers for engaging families in open houses, family nights, or other special activities
- What specific ideas your curriculum offers for engaging families of children with identified or suspected disabilities or with other special needs
- What specific ideas your curriculum offers for engaging families of all backgrounds, including families with a home language other than English or with children learning a tribal language
- What notes and other written materials your curriculum provides to share with families in their home language

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can you use your curriculum and its resources to engage families in ways that are responsive to their interests, languages, and cultural backgrounds?
- What questions do you have about your curriculum's ways of engaging all families? (You may want to explore these questions with an education leader.)



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## SELECTED RESOURCES

**15-minute In-service Suites.** These online professional development resources focus on (1) Engaging Interactions and Environments, (2) Ongoing Child Assessment, and (3) Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning.  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/article/15-minute-service-suites>

**Head Start Center for Inclusion.** This center offers resources to support early childhood educators and program leaders to include children with identified or suspected disabilities. Tools for teachers include visuals and other classroom supports.  
<http://headstartinclusion.org/>

**Implementing a Curriculum with Fidelity.** This webinar provides early childhood educators and program leaders with information about how to use a curriculum in the way it was intended to be used.  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/implementation-curriculum-fidelity>

**MyPeers: A Collaborative Platform for the Early Care and Education Community.** This online community was created specifically for Head Start staff and their partners. It is a social and learning network where you can connect with other early educators using the same curriculum.  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>

**Planned Language Approach: The Big 5 for All—Five Key Areas of Language and Literacy Development for School Readiness.** This set of resources provides information about language and literacy development for children from birth to age five, including strategies for supporting children who are dual language learners in early care and education settings.  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/big-5-all>

**Planned Language Approach: Home Language Support.** This set of resources provides information about the important role of home language in the development of children who are dual language learners.  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/home-language-support>

**Planned Language Approach: Specific Strategies to Support Dual Language Learners When Adults Do Not Speak Their Language.** This set of resources offers specific strategies for supporting infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who are dual language learners when you do not speak their home language.  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/specific-strategies-support-dual-language-learners-dlls-when-adults-do-not>

**Quality Standards for NAFCC (National Association for Family Child Care) Accreditation.** The first three sets of standards (Relationships, The Environment, and Developmental Learning Activities) guide family child care providers' implementation of curricula.  
<https://www.nafcc.org/file/35a7fee9-1ccf-4557-89d4-973daf84a052>

**Teacher Time.** This webcast series provides teachers and family child care providers with information on various topics related to implementing a curriculum responsively with children from birth through age five.  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/teacher-time-series/teacher-time-series>

**Using the ELOF to Inform Curriculum Planning and Implementation.** This tool supports program leaders in aligning their curriculum with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/introduction-elof-implementation-toolkit>



