

EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 10

Infant/Toddler Curriculum, March 2003

How can an EHS program have a written curriculum with lesson plans and still follow the baby's lead as he/she creates his/her own curriculum?

Response:

A written curriculum does not preclude the recommended practices of reciprocal and responsive interactions between teachers and babies. The written curriculum plan defined in the Performance Standards provides a framework within which a local EHS program can articulate their beliefs about what infants and toddlers need to learn and how they learn those things. The local program's curriculum plan provides guidance for how the environment is created, what materials are needed and how they can be used, and how the adults help facilitate learning. A thoughtful curriculum plan that is understood by the entire staff as well as the families will provide consistency in *how* staff follow the baby's lead and in *how well* they understand and support the learning of the baby's own curriculum.

Providing intentional and purposeful learning moments within the curriculum plan means using the knowledge of the child and his/her development to provide experiences and materials the child needs to ensure on-going development. The Performance Standards specifically uses the word "experiences" rather than "activities" within the definition of curriculum. Experiences are the specific and intentional focus of potential learning within activities. An activity may provide a variety of learning experiences for different children depending on where they are developmentally. For example, the activity of reading may provide a two-month-old child the private, cuddling time needed to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with the adult whereas with an eighteen-month-old, reading may provide the opportunity to repeat familiar words and/or to imitate approximate sounds for new ones.

Questions to Consider for Planning and Programming:

- How does the curriculum plan describe the approach each staff member is expected to take with the infants and toddlers? This approach may be a description of what "following the baby's lead" actually looks like and what the adults are doing to promote learning while following the baby's lead.
- How does the written curriculum plan help to remind caregivers and home visitors to include all of the areas required by the Performance Standards in their planning such as: the development of trust and secure relationships, opportunities to explore sensory and motor experiences, and social and emotional development, and communication?
- How does the curriculum plan describe the process for incorporating information from the child's assessment and the Family Partnership Agreement into individualized planning and documentation?
- How does the development of the curriculum plan ensure opportunities for parents to contribute ideas concerning their goals for their children's learning and how they intend to promote that learning?
- How does the curriculum plan ensure full participation of families in the child's learning? How is respect of individual family values and beliefs embedded in the learning experience of the child?

- How does the curriculum plan ensure that the activities and environment are responsive to the varying temperaments, learning styles, languages, and cultural background of the children and families; and support the inclusion of children with disabilities, consistent with their IFSP?
- How does the curriculum plan address the intentionality of the learning experiences? Does the curriculum plan include a description of how learning experiences happen rather than a list of pre-set activities to use? Does it include the goals along with the experiences, roles of the adults, and the use of materials? Are they based on sound child development practice?

Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:

- 1304.3(a)(5) The curriculum is consistent with the Head Start Program Performance Standards and is based on sound child development principles about how children grow and learn. Curriculum means a written plan that includes:
 - (i) The goals for children's development and learning;
 - (ii) The experiences through which they will achieve these goals;
 - (iii) What staff and parents do to help children achieve these goals; and
 - (iv) The materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum
- 1304.21(a)(1)(i)-(ii) In order to help children gain the social competence, skills and confidence necessary to be prepared to succeed in their present environment and later responsibilities in school and life, grantee and delegate agencies' approach to child development and education must be:
 - (i) Linguistically appropriate, recognizing that children have individual rates of development as well as individual interests, temperaments, languages, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles;
 - (ii) Inclusive of children with disabilities, consistent with their Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (see 45 CFR 1308.19).
- 1304.21(a)(2)(i)-(iii) Parents must be:
 - (i) Invited to become integrally involved in the development of the program's curriculum and approach to child development and education;
 - (ii) Provided opportunities to increase their child observation skills and to share assessments with staff that will help the learning experiences; and
 - (iii) Encouraged to participate in staff-parent conferences and home visits to discuss their child's development and education.
- 1304.21(b)(1)(i)-(iii) Child development and educational approach for infants and toddlers. Grantee and delegate agencies' program of services for infants and toddlers must encourage (see 45 CFR 1304.3(a)(5) for a definition of curriculum):
 - (i) The development of secure relationships in out-of-home care settings for infants and toddlers by having a limited number of consistent teachers over an extended period of time. Teachers must demonstrate an understanding of the child's culture and, whenever possible, speak the child's language;
 - (ii) Trust and emotional security so that each child can explore the environment according to his or her developmental level; and
 - (iii) Opportunities for each child to explore a variety of sensory and motor experiences with support and stimulation from teachers and family members.
- 1304.21(b)(2)(i)-(ii) Grantee and delegate agencies must support the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers by promoting an environment that:
 - (i) Encourages the development of self-awareness, autonomy, and self-experience; and

- (ii) Supports the emerging communication skills of infants and toddlers by providing daily opportunities for each child to interact with others and to express himself or herself freely.
- 1304.21(b)(3)(i)-(ii) Grantee and delegate agencies must promote the physical development of infants and toddlers by:
 - (i) Supporting the development of the physical skills of infants and toddlers including gross motor skills, such as grasping, pulling, pushing, crawling, walking, and climbing; and
 - (ii) Creating opportunities for fine motor development that encourage the control and coordination of small specialized motions, using the eyes, mouth, hands, and feet.

Resources:

Early Head Start National Resource Center. **Infant and Toddler Distance Learning Series [video]**. DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 1999.

- **B-1: What Curriculum Means to Infants and Toddlers.**
- **B-2: Developing Curriculum Plans for Infants and Toddlers.**
- **B-3: Curriculum in Action.**

Head Start Bulletin, 67: Curriculum in Head Start. DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. (March 2000).

Head Start Bulletin, 69: Early Head Start. DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. (October. 2000).

Lally, J. Ronald. “**Infants Have Their Own Curriculum: A Responsive Approach to Curriculum Planning for Infants and Toddlers.**” *Head Start Bulletin, 67; Curriculum in Head Start.* (March 2000): 6–8.

Lloyd-Jones, Linda. “**Relationship as Curriculum.**” *Head Start Bulletin, 73: Child Mental Health.* (2002): 10–12.

Semlak, Sarah. “**Curriculum in Early Head Start.**” *Head Start Bulletin, 69: Early Head Start.* (October 2000): 14–15.

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This Tip Sheet is not a regulatory document. Its intent is to provide a basis for dialogue, clarification, and problem solving among Office of Head Start, Regional Offices, TA consultants, and grantees. If you need further clarification on Head Start Policies and regulations, please contact your Regional Program Specialist.