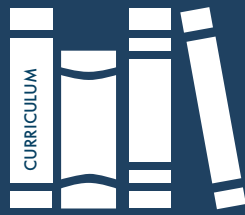


Implementing a Curriculum with Fidelity



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

This document gives answers to common questions about implementing a curriculum with fidelity. Center-based, family child care, and home-based programs must support staff to effectively implement curricula and “at a minimum monitor curriculum implementation and fidelity,” according to Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) §1302.32(a)(2) and §1302.35(d)(2). Education managers, child development specialists, coaches, and program leaders may use this document to support early educators (such as teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors) implement their curriculum with fidelity while being responsive to the strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds of children and families.

Q: What does implementing a curriculum with fidelity mean?

A: Implementing a curriculum with fidelity means that early educators consistently use a curriculum as its developers intended it to be used. This includes implementing the curriculum in ways that are responsive to children’s and families’ strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Infant/toddler teachers, preschool teachers, and family child care providers use a curriculum’s approach and guidance to:

- Organize the learning environment
- Develop a daily schedule
- Provide learning experiences to support children’s individual learning and development across the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) domains
- Engage families in children’s learning

Home visitors use a curriculum’s approach and guidance to:

- Partner with families to develop goals for their child and for themselves
- Foster the parents’ role as the child’s teacher
- Promote the home as a learning environment
- Build parent knowledge and provide parents with opportunities to practice parenting skills and strategies, such as responsive adult-child interactions, to support their children’s individual learning and development across the ELOF domains



Q: How do early educators implement a curriculum with fidelity while also being responsive to children and families?

A: Whether early educators use an infant/toddler, preschool, or home-based curriculum, they can individualize it to meet children's and families' diverse strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Implementing a curriculum with fidelity does not mean that early educators always use the learning activities or plans for home visits exactly as described in the curriculum's approach and guidance.

Teachers and family child care providers intentionally follow the curriculum's approach and guidance while using their knowledge of children's and families' strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds to modify the curriculum's activities or teaching practices. For example, a teacher in an urban area may modify a curriculum unit on "houses" to focus more on "buildings" if the children's neighborhood has apartment buildings instead of single-family houses. A family child care provider who planned to read a book to a toddler according to the curriculum's suggested daily schedule may instead explore the sun shining onto the floor after noticing the toddler's interest in a sunbeam. She may read the book later in the day.

Home-based curriculum activities must be individualized based on the specific life circumstances of the family, the child's or parents' interests, or their cultural or linguistic backgrounds. For example, a home visitor and parent may adjust the home visit plan when a child shows interest in the leaves changing colors and falling from the trees. A home visit plan can be modified to support a family that wants to help their child become fully bilingual by continuing to develop their home or tribal language while the child begins to learn English. Adjustments to a curricular activity should be intentional and follow the curriculum's overall approach, while being responsive to the diverse strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds of families and children.

Q: How do early educators implement a curriculum with fidelity while being culturally and linguistically responsive to children and families?

A: Early educators must implement a curriculum with fidelity while being culturally and linguistically responsive to children and families. They can follow the curriculum's overall approach, learning goals, and scope of activities, but may need to modify the environment and learning activities described in the curriculum to make them culturally and linguistically responsive to children and families. Early educators must respect and include children's and families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to support their full participation in the curriculum. The curriculum should offer suggestions to include children's and families' culture and home languages. Some strategies to adjust a curriculum to make it more culturally and linguistically responsive include:



- Partner with families and community members for guidance in authentically including children’s home languages and cultures (for example, how to greet children and families, or routines for eating or sleeping, within children’s respective cultures)
- Support *all* children and families, including those who speak languages other than English, to fully participate in the curriculum (for example, use a family’s preferred language to communicate with them or use specific teaching practices to support dual language or tribal language learners in center-based or family child care settings)
- Use everyday materials that authentically represent the children’s and families’ backgrounds, cultures, and languages (for example, categorize familiar objects, rather than those offered by the curriculum publisher)
- Build children’s existing knowledge, skills, and experiences when planning learning activities (for example, explore life in a nearby pond where families fish, rather than use a curriculum’s unit on “ocean life” if an ocean is not nearby)

Q: Should early educators follow the sequences of learning activities to implement a curriculum with fidelity?

A: Early educators typically follow the curriculum’s sequences of activities to implement a curriculum with fidelity. Each sequence progressively moves from simple to complex skill- and knowledge-building activities. For example, the sequence of activities on comparing the size of objects might begin with children telling (in their home language or in English) which of two objects is bigger or smaller. It might then continue with children ordering several objects by size. Follow the sequence of activities with fidelity so that children acquire foundational knowledge and skills before proceeding to a more advanced level. Sturdy development at each level in the sequence enhances development at later levels.

Early educators should intentionally use the sequence of learning activities to choose appropriate and relevant learning activities for each child. This may lead early educators to change the curriculum’s sequence of activities. Early educators may decide to use an advanced activity in a sequence with a child who is ready for it, or return to an activity earlier in a sequence so a child strengthens a foundational skill. For example, a child who can easily compare two objects by size would be invited to order more than two objects. Another child may need more practice telling whether one object is larger or smaller than another.

Early educators may shift the order of a sequence of activities to respond to children’s interests or other reasons. Early educators must give all children the appropriate level of support for the chosen activity. For example, early educators may decide to take advantage of a rainy day to explore water by watching leaves and twigs float in rain puddles. This can be done even if this activity was not next in the curriculum’s sequence of activities on water exploration. The early educator may need to prompt children’s water exploration, make connections to prior experiences with water, or introduce new vocabulary about water if the children have not yet developed this knowledge.



Q: How do early educators implement a curriculum with fidelity while individualizing for children with disabilities or other special needs and their families?

A: Early educators have a responsibility to promote the participation, engagement, and learning of all children while implementing a curriculum with fidelity. Modifications help children with (or suspected of having) disabilities or other special needs fully benefit from a curriculum. Small changes in the curriculum, such as modifying activities or materials, can have a big impact. For example, a family child care provider may simplify an activity by breaking it up into smaller steps and provide additional support by prompting the child verbally at each step, such as saying, “First, we will . . .”. The family child care provider may also create a picture chart of the steps the child follows as an environmental support. A home visitor and a parent may want to adapt the plans for home visits to achieve the parent’s goals, modify activities suggested by the curriculum, and discuss supports the parent can use with their child at home. For example, a parent’s goal may be to do more outdoor activities with his or her child who uses a wheelchair. During their joint visit planning time, the parent and the home visitor may add researching nearby wheelchair-accessible playgrounds to the next visit plan. They may modify or reschedule an activity from the curriculum for that week to accommodate this more specific need.

Teachers and family child care providers must modify the learning setting to remove barriers and provide access to a range of activities for children with disabilities or other special needs. For example, a teacher may imprint signs included in the curriculum with braille or tactile symbols so a child with a vision impairment can use them. Similarly, home visitors can work with parents to adapt materials and make changes in the home learning setting. For example, they may glue small knobs on puzzle pieces to support a child with fine motor challenges. This will help the child fully participate in a puzzle activity and at the same time help the child develop fine motor skills.

Curriculum modifications increase participation and support a child to fully access the curriculum as intended. Making minor changes or modifications is therefore essential to curriculum fidelity.

Q: Should early educators use all curriculum resources to implement the curriculum with fidelity?

A: Early educators should use all essential curriculum resources to implement the curriculum with fidelity. Curriculum guides should explain the purpose of each curriculum resource (for example, books, software, or cards) and how they should be used. Curriculum resources that are foundational to the curriculum’s approach and its essential daily activities must be used in the specified way. Other curriculum resources may be used with more flexibility.

For example, teachers and family child care providers may use a curriculum that requires daily read-alouds as an essential daily activity. They must therefore do read-alouds daily to implement the curriculum with fidelity. The teacher or family child care provider will choose



which books to read aloud based on the children's diverse strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Home visitors work with parents to build their capacity to provide nurturing and responsive interactions that promote their children's learning. Home visitors must support parents in achieving the parents' personal goals. These goals are based on the family's life circumstances and the parents' and children's strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Most research-based early childhood home visiting curriculum materials include a segment in each home visit plan for the parents' goals, and focus on activities that follow the child's developmental progress. Home visitors and parents jointly plan each visit and select activities from the curriculum to best meet both the parents' and the child's needs.

Q: How do early educators implement a curriculum and a curriculum enhancement with fidelity?

A: Early educators may use more than one curriculum. For example, a comprehensive curriculum may be used with a curricular enhancement that adds supports in a particular domain, such as early math learning. Each comprehensive curriculum and any curricular enhancements must be implemented as it is intended to be used. An implementation team (including education managers, coaches, early educators, and families) will develop a plan to integrate the foundational components of each curriculum. The implementation team will decide how to use the curricula together to support children's development across all ELOF domains. The team considers:

- Which curriculum or curricula will be used to support each ELOF domain
- How and when each curriculum will be implemented
- How the curricula will be integrated

For example, a center-based program may analyze ongoing assessment data and decide to adopt a social-emotional curriculum to supplement a comprehensive curriculum that supports most ELOF domains. It considers how the learning activities, teaching practices, and materials from each curriculum can be incorporated into a daily schedule to fit the children's strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As a result, they may decide to include conflict resolution activities from the social-emotional curricular enhancement during large and small group times.

Parents in home-based programs may request that home visitors show them how to do literacy activities at home. The home-based program, working with home visitors and parents, may adopt a supplemental literacy curriculum that is designed to be implemented at home. The home-based program will develop a plan to integrate the supplemental curriculum with the current curriculum. Parents and home visitors may decide to have a group socialization on literacy with families. They will discuss literacy-related goals that fit their strengths, needs, interests, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These goals will guide home visitors and parents to choose appropriate activities to do in the home.



Q: What changes to the curriculum are “adaptations” that require expert consultation?

A: The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) §1302.32(b) and §1302.35(d) (3) require programs to consult an external early childhood education curriculum or content area expert when choosing to make significant changes to a comprehensive curriculum or a domain-specific curriculum enhancement. These changes may be required to meet the HSPPS requirements or ELOF learning and development goals. They may be required to better meet the needs of enrolled children or families. Significant changes include adaptations that affect the foundational components of a curriculum, such as the learning goals, scope and sequence, or content in specific learning domains.

Significant changes to a curriculum may be required to make the curriculum appropriate for the children, families, and community the program serves. In this case, an implementation team (including leaders, early educators, and families) will consult external experts on how to adapt the curriculum’s learning goals, materials, or activities. For example, an adaptation that involves adding a new module to a home-based curriculum to better meet the needs of grandparents who are raising their children requires review by an external curriculum expert. The external curriculum expert must ensure that the new module keeps the scientifically valid characteristics of the original curriculum. The external curriculum expert will examine whether the new module adequately includes the curriculum’s foundational components.

Minor changes are planned and implemented by early educators in the program and do not require consulting an external expert. For example, some of the curriculum’s picture books may be supplemented or replaced by books that better represent the family make up of the children who use them. For example, adding books that include grandparents involved in day to day child rearing. The supplemental or replacement books are used in similar ways as those included in the curriculum, such as part of a thematic unit.

Q: How is curriculum fidelity assessed?

A: Programs assess curriculum fidelity by collecting and using data as part of their continuous improvement process of curriculum implementation. Curriculum fidelity data show how closely education staff implement the curriculum as intended. Fidelity may be assessed using observational checklists, rating scales, surveys, or interview questions.

Early educators, coaches, and education managers use fidelity tools provided by the curriculum developer or create their own tools to evaluate and provide feedback on how early educators implement the curriculum. For example, a curriculum developer may offer a rating scale to evaluate how a teacher implements each curriculum activity. Early educators, coaches, and education managers can develop a checklist or survey to understand which aspects of the curriculum early educators easily implement with fidelity and which are challenging.

Most research-based home visiting curricula have fidelity tools or a fidelity process as part of the curriculum implementation process. Home visitors, their coaches, or home-based



supervisors can also create their own checklist to understand how home visitors support parents to implement curriculum-related activities.

Programs identify how to strengthen curriculum implementation by assessing curriculum fidelity. This may include identifying areas in which staff need curriculum-related professional development, targeted coaching, or other supports.

Q: Where can I go for more information on implementing a curriculum with fidelity?

A: CURRICULUM FIDELITY

[Implementation of Curriculum with Fidelity](https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/implementation-curriculum-fidelity). This webinar explores key features of programs that implement curricula with fidelity and introduces ways to help education staff meet the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) related to curriculum fidelity.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/implementation-curriculum-fidelity>

[It's in the Details: Using Practice-Based Coaching to Support Curriculum Fidelity](https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/its-details-using-practice-based-coaching-support-curriculum-fidelity). This webinar explores how practice-based coaching can support curriculum fidelity.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/its-details-using-practice-based-coaching-support-curriculum-fidelity>

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

[Head Start/Early Head Start Home-Based Curriculum Toolkit](#). This set of resources guides programs and home visitors to select and implement home-based curricula.

[Link to be added when available]

[Implementation Guide: Using the ELOF to Inform Curriculum Planning and Implementation](https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/elo-03-inform-curriculum-planning-implement.pdf). This implementation guide supports programs to align a curriculum with the ELOF and effectively plan and implement enhanced program and teaching practices.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/elo-03-inform-curriculum-planning-implement.pdf>

[Supporting Staff to Effectively Implement Curricula](#). This resource provides program leaders with information and support to develop a continuous improvement process of curriculum implementation.

[Link to be added when available]

[Working Toward a Definition of Infant/Toddler Curricula: Intentionally Furthering the Development of Individual Children within Responsive Relationships](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nitr_report_v09_final_b508.pdf). This Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) report explores what “curriculum” means in highly responsive, relationship-based early care and education settings.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nitr_report_v09_final_b508.pdf



CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC RESPONSIVENESS

Dual Language Learner Toolkit. This set of resources guides programs and early educators to provide effective supports to children who are learning more than one language.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/dual-language-learners-toolkit>

Planned Language Approach. This set of resources provides information about how to support children's language and literacy development with cultural and linguistic responsiveness.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach>

INDIVIDUALIZATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES OR SPECIAL NEEDS

Curriculum Modifications: An Introduction. This 15-minute In-service Suite includes a video, PowerPoint presentation, and associated resources about eight types of curriculum modifications.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/curriculum-modifications-introduction>

Head Start Center for Inclusion Training Module: Curriculum Modification and Adaptations. This module provides resources for early educators to modify their curriculum implementation to meet the strengths, needs, and interests of children with disabilities or other special needs.
<http://headstartinclusion.org/modules-curriculum-modifications>



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