



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



Getting Started with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework

Ages Birth to Five

I. THE HEAD START EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five (HSELOF, 2015) replaces the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework* (HSCDEL, 2010). The HSELOF presents five broad areas of early learning, referred to as central domains (See Figure 1 on page 2). These domains reflect research-based expectations for learning and development. The HSELOF emphasizes the key skills, behaviors, and knowledge that programs must foster in children ages birth to 5 to help them be successful in school and life.

The role of the HSELOF in program planning and practice is mandated by the Head Start Act and by the Head Start Program Performance Standards. The Performance Standards describe required teaching practices, learning environments, curricula, assessments and professional development. The HSELOF identifies what young children should know and be able to do. Fully implementing the Performance Standards and the HSELOF will promote high quality services and practice for teaching and learning so that all children can succeed.

What is the HSELOF?

The HSELOF is a guide for programs to plan and implement a comprehensive, yet focused, learning program. The HSELOF:

- Is organized into elements that are research-based, comprehensive, inclusive of all children, manageable, and measurable
- Supports developmentally appropriate curriculum, high-quality learning experiences, and opportunities for play and exploration.
- Acknowledges the importance of caring, nurturing, and emotionally-responsive interactions and relationships for children's learning and development
- Informs intentional teaching practices
- Acknowledges that each child is unique and can be a successful learner
- Identifies learning goals that are important for all children, including children with disabilities
- Acknowledges that children with disabilities may need more individualized or intensive instruction to develop and learn
- Recognizes that children's cultural backgrounds influence the process of their learning and development
- Recognizes that children who speak languages other than English at home bring their language as an asset and have the capacity to learn two or more languages well
- Encourages ongoing, intentional support of a child's home language as well as support for English acquisition

What the HSELOF is not:

- Not a curriculum but guides the selection of research-based curriculum
- Not an assessment tool but guides the selection of valid, reliable, and useful assessments of children’s progress
- Not a developmental checklist but describes skills, behaviors, and knowledge that indicate children are developing and learning

II. THE HSELOF BUILDS ON EARLIER FRAMEWORKS

It is important to help staff and families understand how the HSELOF builds on and continues the important work accomplished using earlier frameworks.

How is the HSELOF similar to earlier frameworks?

- Used by programs to guide choices in curriculum and learning materials, plan daily activities and experiences, and inform quality interactions and intentional teaching practices
- Created using the most up-to-date research as identified by experts in the early childhood field



- Applied to all program options, including centers, family child care, and home visiting programs

How is the HSELOF different from earlier frameworks?

- Focuses on key domains that are essential for school and long-term success
- Begins with infants and toddlers to build a strong foundation for learning and to strengthen continuity in programming from birth to 5

Figure 1. Domain Organization

	CENTRAL DOMAINS				
	APPROACHES TO LEARNING	SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	COGNITION	PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT
▲ INFANT/TODDLER DOMAINS	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communication	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
● PRESCHOOLER DOMAINS	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communication	Mathematics Development	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
			Literacy	Scientific Reasoning	

- Increases specificity of goals and indicators based on an expanding research base about development in the first five years of life
- Emphasizes behavioral indicators that children demonstrate in everyday situations
- Includes information and examples of cultural and linguistic differences that may influence how children demonstrate their skills, behaviors, and knowledge
- Provides information and examples of how children with disabilities may demonstrate what they know and can do and the kinds of support they may need
- Emphasizes the importance of program planning and intentional teaching practices
- Is a helpful tool for effective engagement with families

- Identify program priorities and focus attention and resources on meeting the goals for children’s development and learning
- Communicate about program planning, implementation, and impact with staff, families, advisory board, and the community

Teachers, home visitors, and family child care providers use the HSELOF to:

- Support the development of strong relationships
- Prepare the environment and plan learning experiences to support progress toward the goals
- Engage consistently in meaningful interactions and conversations with children to support their learning in all the domains
- Inform effective, intentional, and responsive teaching practices to help children make progress toward the goals
- Engage parents and family members in understanding and supporting their child’s learning
- Complement information gathered from ongoing assessments

III. WHO IS THE HSELOF FOR AND HOW IS IT USED?

Everyone who cares for children has a role in using the HSELOF, and everyone in the program has a role in implementing and learning how to use it. Here are some of the recommended ways to use the HSELOF in your program with key staff and families. Include directors, managers, teachers, transportation staff, health and nutrition specialists, mental health consultants, disability coordinators, and human relations personnel in this important work.

Directors and managers use the HSELOF to:

- Guide everyday practice in selecting and using curriculum along with teaching and assessment practices that promote the goals for children’s development and learning
- Identify staff training needs and plan for staff training and development





Parents and family members use the HSELOF to:

- Increase their understanding of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children, including the importance of reciprocal interactions and conversations starting in infancy
- Guide focused communication and discussion with teachers about early learning and development and expected outcomes for children
- Work together with program staff to promote their child's development and learning through positive interactions and effective learning experiences

IV. GETTING STARTED: USING THE HSELOF AS A HEAD START LEADER

You can begin to:

- Study the entire document
- Use the introduction to understand the purpose, organization, and changes from previous frameworks
- Carefully read each domain introduction, the sub-domains, goals, developmental progressions, and indicators
- Note your questions and think about how to address them, if necessary, before you meet with staff

- Introduce the HSELOF to the staff, families, and advisory council members
- Emphasize its evolution, the growth in the research base, and continuity with your program's prior work
- Develop a timeline for transitioning your program in using and implementing the HSELOF in staff development, program planning, and operation

You can plan the next steps:

- Determine your program's needs for understanding the HSELOF and identify priorities
- Review the domain alignment across the birth to 5 continuum
- Learn more about the goals and indicators, specifically focusing on examples provided at the indicator level
- Determine how much your program understands the goals and expectations outlined in the HSELOF
- Provide additional professional development to support use of effective practices that are consistent with the HSELOF
- Consider ways to align curriculum goals and assessment tools with the HSELOF.

TIP: Help staff and families get comfortable with the HSELOF through a variety of hands-on learning activities. For example, put charts on the wall for each domain or display photos of classrooms or home visits where children are engaged in learning experiences that represent the domains.