

Using Scope and Sequence to Plan Responsive Learning Experiences for Infants and Toddlers



Infants are born ready to develop and learn. During the first three years of life, infants and toddlers experience rapid growth and development. They develop skills that lay the foundation for all later learning, such as building relationships with others, gaining control over small and large muscles, learning how to communicate using language, and beginning to understand concepts (e.g., cause and effect).

As a teacher, family child care provider, or home visitor, you have the important role of learning about infants' and toddlers' interests and development. This allows you to plan learning experiences

that are responsive to their interests and emerging skills. In center-based and family child care programs, teachers and providers plan learning experiences that they will offer to children. In home-based programs, home visitors work with parents to help them provide learning experiences themselves.

The nature of infant and toddler development requires teaching and caregiving that is responsive to the unique interests and development of individual children. Building on children's interests makes learning experiences more engaging for this age group. Responsive learning experiences allow you to meet infants and toddlers where they are, facilitating their growth to the next developmental level. This is critical to building the knowledge and skills of very young children. Responsive learning experiences should reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of children and their families. This supports children's sense of belonging and makes the learning environment relevant to their lives.

Purpose of This Brief

This brief provides guidance to help you, as education staff, use your curriculum's **scope and sequence** to plan responsive learning experiences for infants and toddlers and their families. You may wonder, "Why would I need a scope and sequence for infants and toddlers?" Because infants and toddlers progress through developmental levels so rapidly, a scope and sequence can be a useful tool to help you pay close attention to the developmental progressions their learning follows, and plan responsive learning experiences that build on their interests and emerging skills. This brief:

- Defines scope and sequence
- Highlights key considerations in the infant and toddler curriculum context
- Describes how to use a scope and sequence to plan responsive learning experiences

Scope and Sequence

An organized developmental scope and sequence outlines what the curriculum focuses on and how the plans and materials support children at different levels of development.

The **scope** refers to the areas of development addressed by the curriculum. It should offer support for children's progress toward the learning goals described in the domains of the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework* (ELOF). The infant and toddler ELOF domains are:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language and Communication
- Cognition
- Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development

The **sequence** of learning experiences includes plans and materials to support and extend children's learning at various levels of development. Each sequence progressively builds from less complex to more complex, with the goal of supporting children as they move through the developmental progressions. A curriculum should include learning experiences to support infants' and toddlers' development at each level of the developmental progressions described in the ELOF:

- Birth to 9 months
- 8 to 18 months
- 16 to 36 months

What do the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) require?

The HSPPS require center-based, family child care, and home-based programs to use curricula that "have an organized developmental scope and sequence that include plans and materials for learning experiences based on developmental progressions and how children learn" §1302.32 (a)(1)(iii) and §1302.35 (d)(1)(iii).

Scope and Sequence: Key Considerations for Infants and Toddlers

When reviewing and using your curriculum's scope and sequence for infants and toddlers, it is important to keep in mind the following child development principles. Though these principles are relevant for children ages birth to 5, they are particularly important for infants and toddlers.

Learning and development happen in the context of relationships.

Infants and toddlers learn through nurturing and responsive interactions with their primary caregivers. Home visitors promote secure parent-child relationships and use their curriculum's scope and sequence to help parents provide learning experiences in the home. Teachers and family child care providers need to first build trusting relationships with infants and toddlers as the foundation for learning. Within the context of an emotionally secure relationship, teachers and providers can use the curriculum's scope and sequence to plan responsive learning experiences.



Learning is integrated.

Though the curriculum's scope may be organized around the different domains, infants and toddlers experience the world and learn in a more integrated way. Single learning experiences often support children's development across multiple domains.

Learning and development vary across individual children.

While the ELOF describes expected developmental progressions, infants and toddlers vary in their development and learning. They each develop at their own rate and may progress more quickly in one domain than another. Additionally, not all infants and toddlers progress through developmental sequences in the same way. There might be differences in developmental sequences that infants and toddlers follow.

For example, young dual language learners (DLLs) will vary in how they develop their home languages and English. Development of each language depends on how much of the language they hear and experience, who is using the language with them, and the child's age and temperament. Infants and toddlers who are DLLs may express their growing knowledge and skills in other domains in either their home language or English.

As a teacher, family child care provider, or home visitor, you work with infants and toddlers at many developmental levels. Your curriculum's scope and sequence should allow for the flexibility to responsively meet the needs of individual infants and toddlers. It should offer a range of learning experiences to support children all along their developmental progressions. When planning learning experiences, choose materials, teaching practices, and learning opportunities that will best support children's current levels of development and help them make progress toward the next developmental level.

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The play environment, interactions and conversations, and caregiving routines support learning and development.

Infants and toddlers are internally driven to explore the world around them, and education staff should ensure infants and toddlers have an engaging play environment. Within this play environment, infants and toddlers learn through nurturing interactions and conversations in their home language and/or in English with their caregivers. They also learn through interactions with their peers. Everyday routines, such as diaper changes, mealtimes, and naptimes, provide rich opportunities to support the learning and development of infants and toddlers. Your curriculum's scope and sequence may offer examples of how to support children's learning and development through the learning environment, interactions, and routines.

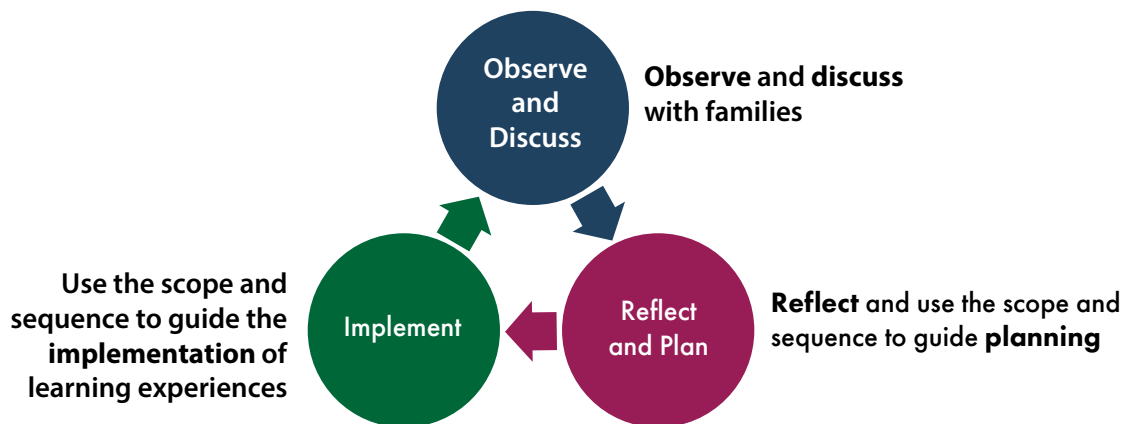
Infants and toddlers initiate their own learning.

As you use your curriculum's scope and sequence to plan for the play environment, interactions, and routines, keep an open mind. Be flexible and allow children to pursue their own interests. Follow the child's lead and adapt to the learning experience the child initiates. Use your curriculum's scope and sequence to identify additional learning experiences that match their interests and developmental levels and build on their linguistic and cultural experiences.



Scope and Sequence: A Tool to Plan Responsive Learning Experiences

Based on an understanding of how infants and toddlers develop and learn, you can use your curriculum's scope and sequence to plan responsive learning experiences that support infants' and toddlers' developing skills, behaviors, and concepts. Your curriculum's scope and sequence can be used as part of a responsive curriculum-planning process that includes the following steps.



Observe and Discuss

As infants and toddlers are constantly learning and making developmental strides, your ongoing observations and conversations with families will help you gain a deep understanding of individual children.

- Observe to learn about the interests and development of infants and toddlers.
- Discuss with parents their child's interests. Ask specific questions to learn what parents have noticed about their child's development at home. Learn from families about the child's home language and culture.

Reflect and Plan

Reflection and planning allow you to take everything you have learned about individual infants and toddlers and decide how you can intentionally and responsively support their learning and development.

- Reflect on observations and discussions with parents. What do you know about children's backgrounds and interests? What skills, behaviors, and concepts are they developing?
- Based on children's backgrounds, interests, and development, think about how to meet children where they are and help take them to the next developmental level. Use your curriculum's scope and sequence to guide planning. It can inform how to set up the learning environment, interact with children, and plan responsive learning experiences.

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Implement

Your curriculum's scope and sequence helps you implement learning experiences tailored to infants' and toddlers' developmental levels.

- Observe how children engage in the learning experience. Think about how you can scaffold their development and learning. What open-ended prompts might you use? What other materials might you offer?
- With infants and toddlers, it is especially important to follow their lead as you implement plans. If an infant has not slept well, he may not be ready to engage in the particular experience you've planned. A toddler may show you that she's more interested in reading a book than playing with the pretend foods you set up. Be flexible and responsive as you implement plans.
- Use your curriculum's scope and sequence to think about how you will support children's next levels of development.

What does this process look like for home visitors?

As a home visitor, you collaborate with parents to plan responsive learning experiences. Talk to parents about their observations of children's interests and development. Assist parents in understanding their child's developmental levels and the types of interactions and experiences that would support their child's learning. With parents, plan how they can use the home as the learning environment, engage in responsive interactions in their home language or English, and provide learning experiences in the home. Encourage parents to implement plans and provide suggestions to them on how to support and extend the child's thinking and exploration during play. Be sure to follow up with parents to help them think about next steps to support their child's development and learning.



Vignettes: Planning Responsive Learning Experiences

Read the following vignettes to learn how a home visitor and a family child care provider used their curriculum's scope and sequence to plan responsive learning experiences.

Promoting Rhianna's Language Development through Home Visiting

Sarah, a home visitor, reflects on her last home visit with Ebony and 16-month-old Rhianna. Ebony had excitedly shared with Sarah that Rhianna had started to say her first words, "mama" and "dog." Sarah reviews the ELOF and sees that Rhianna is working toward using an increasing number of words in conversation (ELOF Goal IT-LC 8). Sarah uses a home-based curriculum that is organized month-by-month, from pregnancy through age 36 months, around a scope and sequence. She reviews the various activities that her curriculum offers to support toddlers' vocabulary development.

At her next home visit, she plans to talk with Ebony about different activities to build Rhianna's vocabulary. For example, she will introduce Ebony to an activity about labeling everyday objects. Sarah plans to model how to do this during routines and throughout the home environment. Sarah will invite Ebony to plan specific ways Ebony can do this activity with Rhianna during their daily routines and in their home environment.

Guiding questions:

- In what ways did Sarah engage with Ebony throughout the responsive curriculum-planning process?
- How did Sarah use her curriculum's scope and sequence to plan with Ebony a learning experience that was responsive to Rhianna's level of language development?

Supporting Tomas's Physical Development in Family Child Care

Juanita, a family child care provider, notices that 6-month-old Tomas has recently started rolling over a few times, trying to reach a toy. During a morning drop-off, Juanita shares this observation with Tomas's father, who mentions that he has moved some of the furniture in their living room to give Tomas more space to roll around. Juanita reviews the ELOF and sees that Tomas is at the earlier levels of working toward the goals of using his large muscles and hands to explore his environment (ELOF Goals IT-PMP 4 and IT-PMP 7).

Juanita looks at her curriculum in the area of physical development to see what kinds of learning experiences would support Tomas at this developmental level. The sequence includes an activity in which a teacher provides a variety of shakers to the children (e.g., shakers with different colors and sounds). Depending on the developmental level of each child, the teacher can gently rattle a shaker in front of a young infant, hand a shaker to a slightly older infant, or place shakers near mobile infants for them to move to and explore. Juanita decides to try out this activity with Tomas and some of the other infants in her group. As they explore the shakers with their hands and mouths, Juanita will describe in Spanish, the children's home language, what they are doing with the shakers and talk about the different kinds of sounds the shakers make.

Guiding questions:

- How did Juanita use the ELOF to better understand Tomas's developmental level?
- How did Juanita use her curriculum's scope and sequence to plan a learning experience that was responsive to Tomas's level of physical development?

Making Connections to Your Curriculum

Use the following questions to reflect on the scope and sequence of your curriculum and how you might use it to plan responsive learning experiences.

- How is the scope of your curriculum organized? What domains of development does it cover?

- Does your curriculum provide examples of materials, teaching practices, and learning experiences to support different levels of development? Give an example of a sequence of learning experiences in your curriculum.

- In what ways does your curriculum provide support and flexibility for individual children at various levels of the developmental progressions?

- What are some specific ways you might use your curriculum's scope and sequence to plan responsive learning experiences for the children and families you work with?

In the next week, try to use your curriculum's scope and sequence to plan and implement a responsive learning experience.

Resources Used to Develop this Brief:

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