

Identify Developmental Goals for Students and/or Clients

ONE OF A CAREGIVER'S RESPONSIBILITIES is to identify developmental goals for the children in the programs. Goals should be based on a child's age, but they also should take into consideration other aspects of the child's background. Likewise, a caregiver for older adults must identify developmental goals for the clients. The caregiver should provide the tools and assistance to support development.



Objectives:



1. Identify developmental goals for young children.
2. Identify developmental goals for older adults.

Key Terms:



accommodations
age-appropriate
fine motor skills
gross motor skills
Illinois Early Learning Standards
observe

Developmental Goals for Children

When setting developmental goals for young children, caregivers must determine what is appropriate. Goals should be **age-appropriate**—suitable for children of a particular age range. While not all children reach developmental goals at the same time, a child's age can serve as a guide for what the child may be able to do.

BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

Caregivers should consider the child's background when identifying developmental goals. A child's parents, culture, economic status, and social status affect development. Health may also affect development. Babies who were born prematurely may reach developmental milestones in infancy later than full-term babies. Other conditions (e.g., cerebral palsy or autism) slow some areas of development.

OBSERVATION

Caregivers should **observe** (watch and listen to children in the classroom setting without interacting with them). Observation gives caregivers a better idea about the child's current developmental level and what goals the child is ready to pursue. Children attain related developmental goals in a specific order. For example, children learn to walk before they can run, and they jump on two feet before they can hop on one foot. Likewise, children must learn to recognize the letters of the alphabet before they can read.



FIGURE 1. Caregivers should observe children as they play to assess their current skills and to determine what developmental goals are appropriate.

GUIDELINES

The **Illinois Early Learning Standards**, developmental goals for young children outlined by the state, provide specific guidelines for children. The standards set benchmarks for developmental goals and provide specific examples of activities that help develop a particular skill.

SETTING GOALS

Goals for physical development are broken into two categories: gross and fine motor skills. **Gross motor skills** are actions controlled by the large muscles of the body. Examples include jumping, skipping, walking on a balance beam, and climbing. **Fine motor skills** are actions controlled by the small muscles of the body (e.g., the hand). Examples include picking up small objects, holding a pencil, cutting with scissors, or stringing beads.

Language Development

Language development includes verbal skills (e.g., increasing vocabulary, speaking in sentences, and using words to express feelings). Pre-reading skills include recognizing letters and understanding that words move from left to right on the page. Some older preschool children may even develop reading skills (e.g., sounding out letters or words, reading, and writing).

Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills involve gaining knowledge of facts, identifying colors and numbers, and sorting and classifying objects. Decision-making and problem-solving skills are improved with cognitive development.

Social Development

The preschool years are an important time for social development. Goals may include showing independence when choosing an activity or when pursuing interests. Sharing, taking turns, and following directions also are important skills that children begin to develop.

PRACTICING SKILLS

Children need the opportunity to practice new skills to meet their developmental goals. Caregivers should provide age-appropriate materials and equipment (e.g., art supplies, books, playground equipment, and toys). For example, children develop fine motor skills by coloring with crayons, holding a paint brush, and feeding themselves with child-sized utensils. Children also need plenty of time to practice skills. Each school day should include free time to pursue interests, time to practice skills at activity centers, and outside time to practice physical skills.



FIGURE 2. Each school day should include time outside for children to develop their gross motor skills.

Developmental Goals for Older Adults

Developmental goals for older adults cannot be based on age because the health and abilities of older individuals can vary greatly. One 80-year-old woman may take long walks every morning, drive to a school where she volunteers every afternoon, and cook dinner every eve-

ning. In contrast, another 80-year-old woman may barely be able to stand, have a loss of vision and hearing, and have severe memory problems.

APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

Caregivers must determine what is appropriate for each individual. It may be a good idea to consult with the individual's doctors, therapists, and family members when setting developmental goals. Caregivers should consider the participant's physical abilities and limitations as well as his or her health and mental status.

Cognitive Skills

For some older adults, the main goal may be to maintain current developmental skills rather than achieving new ones. Cognitive skills are maintained through daily activities (e.g., reading, doing crossword puzzles, and playing games—especially ones that require memory or problem-solving skills).

Physical Skills

Physical skills are maintained through exercise. Physical decline is often a circular problem. Weakness and pain may cause an individual to become less active, and inactivity may speed physical decline and make pain worse. For example, an individual with arthritis may avoid using his or her hands in activities such as opening jars or holding a pen, but movement helps the joints function better.

Movement

Sometimes family members or other caregivers offer assistance because it is faster or more convenient, but it could be detrimental to an older adult's development. An older adult's family may suggest he or she use a wheelchair because movement is too slow with a walker. But if the individual does not practice walking every day, he or she will lose strength and stamina and may lose the ability to walk.

Communication

Problems such as age- or illness-related speech problems, mental decline, and hearing loss may make it harder for an older



FIGURE 3. Developmental goals for older adults often focus on maintaining current physical skills, such as walking.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Learning Standards

A number of activities support any given developmental goal for children. For example, scribbling with crayons and picking up Cheerios at snack time develop fine motor skills that are necessary before a child can learn to hold a pencil and write his or her name.

Visit the following Web site to view an assortment of videos showing specific activities that support the Illinois Early Learning Standards:

<http://illinoisearlylearning.org/standards/index.htm>

adult to communicate. Without practice (e.g., daily conversations), the individual may begin to lose language skills.

Accommodations

Accommodations are adaptations that allow an individual to retain a skill. Examples include providing jar openers to a person with arthritis or a walker to a person with weak legs. It is better to find a way to assist an individual in completing a task instead of doing it for him or her. This helps the individual's self-esteem and independence.

In some cases, an older adult's developmental skills may be regained. Older adults are still capable of learning new things (e.g., computer skills). In addition, exercise builds muscles and improves stamina at any age. Older adults can reach developmental goals after specific injuries or illnesses (e.g., walking after hip surgery or speaking after a stroke).

Summary:



When setting developmental goals for young children or older adults, caregivers must determine what is appropriate. Caregivers should consider a child's background and what is age-appropriate. With older adults, physical abilities, health, and mental status should be considered as well.

Both age groups need appropriate equipment and materials as well as free time to practice their new skills to reach developmental goals. Children often reach goals in a specific order, although not necessarily at the same time as other children of the same age. Older adults can reach new developmental goals, but they often must work to maintain the skills they already have.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What factors should a caregiver consider about a child's background when identifying developmental goals?
2. What are Early Learning Standards?
3. What is the difference between gross and fine motor skills?
4. What should a caregiver consider about an older adult when identifying developmental goals?
5. What are accommodations?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



It may be difficult for teachers to work with a group of students of different developmental levels. For example, one four-year-old child may not recognize all the letters of the alphabet, while another is starting to sound out words. Interview a preschool teacher and ask for strategies on dealing with varying developmental levels in the classroom.

Web Links:



Preschool Planning Guide

<http://www.nncc.org/Curriculum/planguide.html>

Head Start Child Outcomes Framework

<http://www.hsnrc.org/CDI/pdfs/UGCOF.pdf>

Mental Skills in the Elderly: Lost and Found

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1200/is_v129/ai_4211083/?tag=content;col1