

Colorado Early Learning & Development Guidelines

The [Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines](#) describe the trajectory of children's learning and development from birth to 8 years old in Colorado. They include a broad description of children's growth to ensure a holistic approach to creating positive early childhood environments. For each age level, this document addresses approaches to learning, health and physical development, social and emotional development, language, literacy, numeracy, logic and reasoning, and other subject-specific learning. Although the specific domains used to organize descriptions of children's development evolve within the Guidelines to reflect the specific requirements of each age group, they maintain a broad view of the whole child and describe all aspects of children's growth.

Also of importance to the Guidelines is that they acknowledge and are responsive to variations in culture, languages, and abilities. For instance, child rearing practices, developmental expectations, the role of different family members, and the child's own individual versus collective identity may vary across cultures. To address this, the Guidelines include examples and resources that address the particular requirements of children for whom English is a second language and children with learning or physical challenges. The Guidelines also acknowledge the great variation in when and in what order children attain particular developmental milestones. The knowledge and skills described are designed to provide support and information to families, caregivers, and educators concerning children's development within certain age spans, rather than dictate exactly when or how each child should progress.

These Guidelines are aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards for preschool through third grade and with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. They are designed to show the continuum of development from birth through age 8, while complementing the variety of existing expectations and models being used in the State of Colorado with each age group. Thus, the Guidelines were informed by a wide variety of state and national documents, including current research on early learning and best practices in early education. Additionally, representatives from a wide variety of Colorado agencies were involved in planning the document's design, providing input and information, and reviewing its final contents.

By including the full breadth of children's development, addressing diversity, and aligning content across all early childhood settings and early grades, these Guidelines are intended to effect greater collaboration and consistency across early childhood systems in Colorado. With collaboration and common reference points, we can create positive early childhood environments that lay a critical foundation for our young children's later success.

The Guiding Principles (Principles) below describe what we believe to be true both about children and about the environments that best support children's growth and development. These Principles highlight aspects of children and early learning development that span across the domains. They were adopted from two highly regarded resources, *Neurons to Neighborhoods* and *The Irreducible Needs of Children*.

The Colorado Early Learning and Developmental Guidelines are based on the following principles:

1. **Nature and nurture affect children's development;** child development is shaped by a dynamic and continuous interaction between biology and experience.
2. **Culture influences** every aspect of human development and is reflected in childrearing beliefs and practices designed to promote healthy adaptation.
3. The growth of **self-regulation** is a cornerstone of early childhood development that cuts across all domains of behavior.

4. Children are **active participants** in their own development, reflecting the intrinsic human drive to explore and master one's own environment.
5. Human **relationships** are the building blocks of healthy development.
6. The broad range of **individual differences** among young children often makes it difficult to distinguish normal variations and maturational delays from transient disorders and persistent impairments.
7. The development of children unfolds along individual pathways whose trajectories are characterized by **continuities and discontinuities**, as well as by a series of significant transitions.
8. Human development is shaped by the ongoing interplay among sources of **vulnerability** and sources of **resilience**.
9. The **timing of early experiences can matter**, but, more often than not, the developing child remains vulnerable to risks and open to protective influences throughout the early years of life and into adulthood.
10. The course of development can be altered in early childhood by **effective interventions** that change the balance between risk and protection, thereby shifting the odds in favor of more adaptive outcomes.

The Guidelines promote environments that foster growth in young children, which include:

1. Ongoing nurturing **relationships** that provide the basis for physical and emotional well-being.
2. Physical protection, **safety**, and regulation for children's security.
3. **Tailored experiences** to individual differences so that children have choices and are respectful of others' choices.
4. **Developmentally appropriate experiences** that build children's skills.
5. Limit setting, **structure**, and expectations that provide a secure environment.
6. Stable, supportive **communities** and cultural continuity.