



The Hawai'i Early Learning and Development Standards (HELDS)

Supplemental Guides for Preschoolers

Challenging Limits: Challengers 24 to 36 months

This Guide was developed by the University of Hawai'i at Manoa Children's Center with support from the State of Hawai'i Executive Office on Early Learning and Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education.



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The Hawai'i Early Learning and Development Standards (HELDS) describes what young children, ages birth through five, typically should know and/or be able to do at different periods in their developmental progression. During this period the architecture of a child's brain and nervous system is under construction and this development becomes the foundation for learning in the school years. By understanding the HELDS benchmarks and how learning established in an earlier period is the basis for future learning, parents and caregivers can provide children with a strong foundation to become lifelong learners.

HELDS Supplemental Guides for Preschoolers

The HELDS Supplemental Guides for Preschoolers is a multi-part series that looks at three distinct periods of development roughly associated with age level. These periods are identified by a hallmark developmental purpose: **Challenging Limits** (24 to 36 months), **Initiating Independence** (36 to 48 months), **Social Negotiation** (48 months to Kindergarten Entry). While these are not the only major aspects of development children address in a given period, they do serve to help illustrate the rapid growth and unique developmental needs of children during a particular period.

The guides provide information on:

- Typical preschooler behaviors within each of the HELDS domains, listed in approximate sequences of development;
- Specific ways in which caregivers can support development and learning; and
- Key preschooler outcomes that result from these supports.

Development is progressive, but children do not step through it in a constant, linear fashion. The age groupings noted here are for convenience in discussion and not intended to be hard definitions of developmental phases. Children move from one developmental phase to the next in their own time and in their own way. A 3½-year-old **Initiator** may still be

demonstrating behaviors relating to the **Challenger** group and taking on behaviors relating to the **Negotiator** group. Experienced caregivers understand this and tailor their practices according to individual needs. These guides provide a starting place for caregivers to reflect on the extent to which their current strategies, interactions, environments, and care plans support optimal individual development. While the examples listed are not exhaustive, they provide an overall picture of healthy development and quality caregiving. The domains noted are loosely defined. Skills and activities noted under a given domain could easily be applied to one or more other domains. They are provided only to give a framework for understanding and discussion.

Challenging Limits: Challengers 24 to 36 Months

One defining characteristic of this age level is the tendency of two-year-olds to challenge physical, social, and intellectual limits. This can often lead to the testing of adult patience, one reason why these months are often referred to as the "Terrible Two's." This behavior helps the young preschooler develop a more complex understanding of themselves and their environment. They may repeat questions or try experiments over and over again to see if they get the same responses, and then try the same behaviors at different times, in different places, and with different people to see if the responses change. They are beginning to understand patterns in behavior, events, and materials they find engaging. Two-year-olds explore with their entire bodies. Physically, gross motor and fine motor skills are a little more controlled, expanding access to new spaces and materials. Communication skills become better refined so the child can be more specific in expressing wants and needs. This opens the door to a larger awareness of the people and things around the child, and the understanding that these things can be manipulated. By establishing consistent routines, behavior expectations, and access to a variety of materials and experiences, the Challenger can have a firm basis for confident experimentation, laying the foundation for future development.

HELDS DOMAIN

Physical Well-Being, Health and Motor Development

This domain encompasses physical growth and maturation, including the ability to move and use the body. The Challenger explores the environment in active, playful ways while seeking independence in all ways.

Examples of typical Challenger behaviors:



- Walks up and down stairs, alternating feet
- Runs around, making wide turns and frequent stops
- Jumps with two feet off the ground
- Climbs furniture
- Pedals tricycles or scoot when riding other small vehicles
- Eats with utensils and cups with greater purpose and accuracy
- Begins to demonstrate hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills (e.g., uses small tongs to pick up objects, grabs knobbed puzzle pieces with fingertips)
- Begins to master dressing and undressing self independently
- Shows an interest in using the toilet



Examples of caregiver practices that support development:



- Varies floor materials to add textural changes that encourage spatial awareness and engage senses
- Provides materials and equipment to challenge large muscle development (e.g., pedal vehicles, balance bikes, climbing obstacles, tunnels, stairs, ramps)
- Plays with the child to encourage throwing, catching, and kicking, dancing and movement
- Provides a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity throughout a full day of care.
- Provides materials and equipment to challenge small muscle development (e.g., tongs, eye droppers, puzzles with knobs, beads and string)
- Provides thick markers, crayons or pencils and large paper to encourage drawing
- Encourages the child to eat and drink using utensils and cups without lids
- Includes cooking activities that engage children in varied food textures, preparation skills that include stirring, measuring and spooning, and safety rules for hot surfaces and sharp implements
- Avoids sensory confusion with scented items that are not made for the mouth (e.g., scented markers, candles, play dough)

These types of caregiver supports help Challengers to:



- Develop muscle coordination and balance
- Develop a sense of time and space
- Establish early patterns of a healthy lifestyle
- Practice skills that encourage independence

Social and Emotional Development

This domain includes the ability to regulate behaviors and emotions and to form healthy relationships. The Challenger engages in parallel play and begins to initiate play with peers. The Challenger also gains greater expression of a range of emotions, both verbally and non-verbally.

- Demonstrates an ability to self-comfort (e.g., taking less time to recover from separation from caregiver)
- Initiates interaction with familiar adults and peers verbally and non-verbally
- Demonstrates an interest in what others are doing
- Begins to take turns with materials and toys during play if wait is not too long
- Demonstrates empathy (e.g., gets a peer a tissue or bear)
 - Begins to respond to guidance in reference to both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors
 - Starts labeling things or behaviors as “good” or “bad”

- Maintains a minimal number of appropriate, meaningful, and consistent routines and rules that apply across settings
- Provides opportunities for the child to play with a variety of other children from different backgrounds and skill levels
- Regularly models social interaction skills and problem solving
- Uses familiar phrases from the child’s home language
- Models, shows and talks about the impact of social actions (e.g., explains how a peer could feel when hit, what could happen if running with an egg, why the gate needs to be closed)
- Models, shows and talks about a variety of social settings, cultures and languages (e.g., visits a library, listens to music from various genres and countries, changes dramatic play to reflect different community jobs)
- Provides opportunities for the child to make appropriate and varied choices
- Provides quiet, private spaces in both indoor and outdoor areas

- Demonstrate a positive sense of self
- Develop a sense of empathy
- Demonstrate a sense of belonging
- Develop better control of emotions

Approaches to Play and Learning

This domain encompasses the processes that underlie learning. The Challenger’s attention span begins to increase as curiosity in experiments and experiences increase. The Challenger demonstrates more intentional problem solving skills by building upon past experiences and moving away from trial and error.

- Becomes more responsible for personal items (e.g., blankets, shoes, favored toys) but may need reminders
- Is curious about learning new things and trying new tasks
- Demonstrates greater interest in doing things independently
- Asks questions and seeks help both verbally and non-verbally
- Responds to simple questions both verbally and non-verbally
- Uses senses and tools when exploring the environment to make new discoveries (e.g., uses a shovel or stick to dig holes, build sand mounds, capture worms, or “stir soup”)
- Shows creativity and imagination in problem solving
- Creates structures out of a variety of materials
- Begins to engage in pretend play (e.g., expects the caregiver to make a phone sound when a phone is held to the child’s ear)

- Is available to provide help when needed
- Encourages the child to make choices from several acceptable options
- Models a range of appropriate ways to express different feelings
- Asks about what the child may be thinking, wondering, or attempting to do
- Provides opportunities for the child to take reasonable risks and to try new things
- Encourages the child to help with clean-up, set-up and maintenance chores
- Asks open-ended questions (e.g., “How did you do that?” “Why did that happen?” “And then what happened?”)
- Includes open-ended materials (e.g., lengths of fabric that could be a dress, cape, tent, stream, or hammock; boxes that could be car, crib, building, oven or storage container)
- Models problem solving (e.g., thinks out loud about how to see if a puzzle piece fits)

- Engage in exploration
- Develop a sense of responsibility
- Engage in imaginative play
- Develop a flexible sense of routine



Cognition and General Knowledge

This domain includes thinking, reasoning, and using information to acquire knowledge and understanding of one's world. The Challenger likes to test boundaries, repeat activities to see if results are consistent over time and in different contexts. They can recall events over time, and apply that information to similar situations. The Challenger begins to understand and recognize simple patterns and obvious differences, and begins to solve problems with creativity and joy.

- Shows an interest in cause and effect relationships (e.g., drops an object into a bowl of water repeatedly to see if the same thing happens every time, then tries it with other objects)
- Begins to understand that actions in one context are appropriate, but are not appropriate in another context (e.g., you can hit a peg with a play hammer but you cannot hit a person with a play hammer)
- Shows an interest in sorting (e.g., puts all the blue buttons in one bowl, and all the red buttons in another bowl)
- Says the appropriate number name related to the number of fingers held up in one hand
- Stacks nesting blocks into a tower, then knocks it down
- Starts helping with household jobs (e.g., wiping spills, watering plants)
- Responds to music with joy (e.g., claps, dances, hits a drum)
- Experiments with art materials (e.g., mixes paints with hands, then paints paper, clothes, floors, hair)

- Provides a variety of materials and tools to experiment with and manipulate (e.g., blocks of ice in water with cups, paint powder to mix with water and brush)
- Provides a variety of materials that can be ordered by size, shape, or other characteristics
- Uses numerical concepts in everyday activities (e.g., "Choose one cracker" "You have two hands")
- Uses descriptive words relating to size, shape, color, texture or quantity (e.g., many, bright, rough, round, big) singly and in conjunction with representations of the different attributes (e.g., "this one is rough, this one is bumpy, and this one is smooth")
- Provides the child with regular opportunities to explore natural objects, events and settings (e.g., playing in tall grass, watching a butterfly lifecycle, interacting with a trail of ants, splashing in a puddle, collecting leaves)
- Provides access to a variety of music, art, and dramatic play materials throughout the day

- Develop sorting and patterning skills
- Develop a sense of quantity
- Develop a sense of logic
- Engage in imaginative expression

English Language Arts and Literacy

This domain encompasses response to and use of communication. The Challenger uses a larger vocabulary, especially adjectives. The Challenger can understand more language than he or she can express. The Challenger is beginning to understand symbols and the importance of print.

- Able to answer questions logically (e.g., tells a caregiver, "I had cupcake!" when asked about what she did last night)
- Uses curiosity about the environment to expand vocabulary (e.g., points to a new statuette in the room and asks, "What this?")
- Cuddles up and listens to a story being read
- Gazes intently at stories being told with puppets or large illustrations
- Points out the cow in a book illustration and says, "Moo"
- Explores books independently, turning each page
- Begins to understand that written words have meaning (e.g., finds his own cubby to put things away by looking for his picture next to his name)
- Drawings begin to include circles
- Starts to speak in sentences longer than three words (e.g., "I can do it!")
- Is able to follow non-routine two-step instructions, though may often choose not to

- Models descriptive and polite language
- Pauses when coming to a noun or verb in a familiar story to let the child fill in the blank
- Has books available for the child to choose, rotating some while keeping others of high interest available
- Labels the child's cubby with his or her name and a picture or unique symbol to help the child cue to the correct name
- Offers rhymes, finger plays and songs throughout the day
- Spends time each day collaborating with the children on drawing projects with a large crayon, marker or pencil

- Engage in more specific verbal communication
- Develop multiple means of communication
- Develop an interest in story
- Develop a sense of rhythm and rhyme



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Downloads

Hawai'i Early Learning and Development Standards (HELDS) and all the supplemental material can be found at:
p3hawaii.org/HELDS/standards

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