



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

Supplemental Guides for Preschoolers

Using HELDS and the Supplemental Guides

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## Supplemental Guides for Preschoolers

### Using HELDS and the Supplemental Guides

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

The HELDS Supplemental Guides is a multi-part series that looks at periods of development roughly associated with age level. Each period is identified by a hallmark developmental purpose: **Building Security** (Birth to 8 months), **Moving and Exploring** (8 to 18 months), **Discovering Identity** (18 to 24 months), **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 infant, toddler or 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.

#### Multi-age vs Multi-ability

Each guide represents the framework commonly associated with a developmental period. Early childhood caregivers understand that, while age may be one convenient way of talking about development, ability may be a more accurate perspective. This is because even if a group of children were the same age there would be a range of interests, abilities, and ways of going about things. Those who deal with mixed age groups would therefore be expected to deal with an even wider range of abilities.

Each supplemental guide is based on the HELDS continuum to show progression. This means that a caregiver could take several consecutive guides and look at them side-by-side to get an idea of how one concept or skill leads into another in the next guide. This is helpful because the caregiver can use multiple guides to get an idea of how to adjust a support up or down to appropriately challenge an individual child's current ability. The age groupings are there just to get an idea of where to start. The caregiver should focus on ability, and may therefore need to use more than one guide to describe an individual child.

## Where You Are

This is a user's guide to help you navigate a series of documents designed to help you create an enriched and meaningful world for young children that will form the basis for their lifelong learning. The goal here is to help you identify the core needs of young children and build on them to support a quality system of early childhood education. Whether you are a parent providing care to your child, a family child care provider caring for a number of children in your home, or a preschool teacher in a public school, every adult interacting with a young child is part of a larger educational system that goes beyond the formal school setting. We are now recognizing this larger view of what education is, and are trying to define core concepts and skills that every child will need to be effective learners in a modern world.





## Maps to Guide You

HELDS is a tool, a map that sets boundaries of where the typical child would be at during a given period of time to help guide your curriculum development. HELDS is a series of performance benchmarks set on a continuum. Each line in HELDS takes a skill or concept and shows how it is built upon as the child moves from one age group to another leading to Kindergarten entry. It will be rare to find a child that is exactly within the age group on every benchmark. Children will be mostly within the age group, and above or below in specific areas.

And now we come to the tricky part. While the benchmarks identify ideal child performance, they are written so adults have an idea of what to look for and what to target in their programs. They cannot be used to gauge child development because the benchmarks were not written to sort children by their level of performance. It is not possible to say that a child is “ahead” or “behind” in development or expectation just because his or her current performance is observed to be above or below his or her age band. As humans we need to allow for uneven growth. It is important to allow the child to learn at his or her own pace, particularly when the child is trying to develop an identity of empowerment and ability. We are trying to set up a rich and encouraging environment so that, when the child is ready, the child can move forward.

HELDS can be used to identify the things that would be helpful for the child to understand or do by the end of one age band to prepare for the next band. As you care for a child you could use HELDS to help give you ideas for the kinds of things that would be appropriate to challenge a child on, scaling to be more complex or more simplified depending on the child. Because this is a new way of thinking it may be hard to translate a given benchmark into practice, so there are supplemental guides for each age band to help you. These guides give you a more descriptive look at the typical child in a given age band, with ideas a caregiver could do to support growth. These guides compliment HELDS. Together they create a reasonable picture of what caregivers in Hawai'i could do to lay a rich foundation for future growth in a formal educational setting.

HELDS can be used to create a check on what you do to make sure you are hitting core concepts and skills. The guides can help you here. Unfold the guides and you will find three rows of ideas to help you, loosely sorted by HELDS domain. The first row helps describe the kinds of things a typical child might do or work on throughout that particular age band. These are related to HELDS, but the connection may not always be obvious. The second row shows examples of the things a caregiver could do to support the child's work. The third column describes the skills and concepts the child is working on as they perform their work. This third column can act like a weekly or monthly checklist for you to make sure most of the major skills and concepts are being targeted. This list will not be complete because there has to be room for you to lay in the things you feel are also important for children in your care to know and do. Many of these things you probably do naturally and never really thought about them consciously. They are important and it would be nice to honor them with the same level of attention you would give to something like knowing how to count pennies.

## Curriculum and Other Terms

“Curriculum” is a word borrowed from the formal educational setting to refer to what early childhood caregivers do when they work with children. Sometimes it is intentional, sometimes not. HELDS is not a curriculum, it is part of a curriculum. There are many things you do regularly with young children that are not found in HELDS. HELDS does not define culture or values. HELDS does not tell anyone how to work with children. HELDS focuses on core skills and concepts, but there are so many additional things you do that are also important. One tremendous benefit to the process of working with HELDS is that these wonderful additions can be brought to light and presented with more intention and purpose. By doing this we create a fertile dialogue with our colleagues that can improve early childhood education and lead it down a path that benefits everyone.

“Pedagogy” is another word borrowed from the formal education setting. It refers to the way something is being taught. The way you show a child how to cut a banana is a pedagogical approach. We could say it is

an “educational” approach, but that term is generally limited to what we commonly know as “academics.” In early childhood, pedagogy can also refer to the values, customs, manners of speech and other culture-based elements that we cannot help but include when working with young children.

“Care plan” is a term used in different fields to emphasize different things. In formal education it could refer to an Individualized Education Plan. In early childhood this is beginning to be used to refer to the three or four goals the caregiver has decided to work on with an individual child at a specific point in time. Parents often do this informally, like when they start working to get a young child into a particular routine or in potty training. Non-parental caregivers could sit down with the parent and talk about specific goals the team could work on together. This is happening more and more in early childhood, and the framework HELDS provides could help make this easier and more visible. These kinds of partnerships with parents are an important component of a high quality early childhood setting.

### **Putting it Together**

Certainly one goal here is for all caregivers of young children to work together from similar pages. That way we can all effectively share ideas and support each other for the benefit of all children. We are not talking about kindergarten readiness, but rather setting up patterns of learning and engagement that will smooth

the way for our children to make the transition to more formal learning settings. Another goal is to bring what we naturally do to a more conscious level so we can move forward with clear intention. This will help us communicate appropriate needs and goals for young children to people who may not be as familiar with the field as we are, but who want to support changes and improvements nonetheless. Early childhood is now part of the overall education system. That can be a very wonderful and powerful thing if we move forward with clear, intelligent intention. This is our start.

Anybody regularly working with young children, including families, day care providers, and preschools can create a basic curriculum using ideas from the guides and HELDS, and a little thought about what is important for young children in Hawai‘i to know about. Experiment with activities, stories and phrases to see what connects with your children. It might be helpful to write up a paragraph or two describing how you want to interact with the children. You could talk about how you plan to deal with non-compliant behavior. You could describe the kind of mentor you want to be for the children, and then take time at the end of each day to see if you were that person. No one can be that ideal person every day so give yourself permission to be human. Just focus on how you can make it better tomorrow and move on. This could be part of your own personal care plan because we are all works in progress. The goal is to move closer toward being the best human we can be.

### **It’s the Journey**

More than anything else, early childhood is about the journey, not the destination. HELDS is provided to enhance early childhood, not to put young children into a 24-hour formal learning environment. Initiate large, creative projects. Explore the lifecycle of a cockroach. Model your cultural expectations. Do what you feel is important. HELDS is here to help you understand that adding a little thing here or there could make a world of difference for the young child later on. Doing things with clear intention and purpose is important, but you don’t have to suck the fun out of everything while you do it. We are providing the road map, you are providing the car (the curriculum), the direction (the pedagogy), and the repair kit (the care plan) if you get stuck. HELDS and the supplemental guides are road maps to help you find many ways to get to where you want to go. So go forth and conquer!

