

Resource 2.

Setting Goals for Children and Tracking Children's Growth

What do you want to see children learn and develop over time?





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Welcome

What will you find in this document?

In this resource, you will find guidance on using screening tools, incorporating learning standards, and establishing goals to monitor the progress of children with different ages and abilities in your program.

Why is this information important?

It is important to set goals and track the growth of children in your program across time. You can use goals and information on children’s growth **to choose the learning activities that will be most helpful to the children in your program.**

Guided Reflection Templates and Example

These templates can help you **reflect on and plan how to set goals and track the growth for children** of different ages and abilities in your program. You also will find **an example** of how an educator might set goals and track growth for children in their program using these templates.



Guided Reflection Templates

A. Selecting Tools for Screening

Screening tools can give you information on how children are growing typically and help identify any delays or areas of growth.

- The CDC Developmental Milestones is an online resource you can use to explore what you can expect most children to be able to do as they grow:
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>. For example, at one year old, most children will be able to wave hello and goodbye. The CDC Developmental Milestones include milestones for children from 0 – 5 and is available in multiple languages. There are also other tools and resources you can use such as checklists and an app available on the website.
- It also is important to **ask parents and family members about their children**, including their children’s strengths (e.g., a love for books) and areas for growth (e.g., being able to dress independently).
- Consider that some children in your program may have early intervention (EI), special education, or other external supports. It is important that you **have open and respectful conversation** with the child’s family **to make sure that you are implementing any professional recommendations to support the child** in the program.

In my program, considering the tools for screening selected, I have children with the following interests and areas for growth.

Child name and age	Child’s interests	Child’s areas for growth



For an example of how to describe a child’s interests and areas for growth, see the Examples section.



B. Using Learning Standards to Set Goals for Children by Age and Developmental Level

- **Children have different types of goals at different ages and developmental stages.** After using screening tools to better understand a child’s developmental stage, you can use the **Massachusetts guidelines** to identify and set goals for the children in your care.



Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers:

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-early-learning-guidelines-for-infants-and-toddlers/download>



Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences:

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/guidelines-for-preschool-learning-experiences-updated-november-2019/download>

- **Plan to collaborate with parents and family members to set goals for the children** in your care. When possible, **include the same goals that families** have for their children as their goals in your program.
- Start with setting **social-emotional goals** before setting other types of goals.
- **You can set the same goals for a group of children based on their age.** The Massachusetts guidelines provide both age-specific goals and suggested activities. **Resource 4: Choosing Activities for Learning and Play** will help you plan activities to help children reach the goals you have set for them. Please remember that even if a group of children has the same goals, you can offer different resources and supports to each child based on their individual needs.
- For **school-age children**, choose goals with **input from their families or the children themselves.** Goals for school-age children could include the following:
 - ✓ Maintaining effort across time for a long-term project
 - ✓ Finding and doing hobbies (such as sports or drawing)
 - ✓ Reading aloud or demonstrating skills in front of others



Use the Massachusetts guidelines to identify and set a few goals for the children in your program.

You can set a mix of goals by age and custom goals for each child, based on their needs. If the goals for a child’s age do not fit their needs (for example, if a child has special needs), you can develop custom goals for that child. For example, if a child has not yet started talking, but the goals for their age are about speaking in phrases or sentences, you can create different language goals for that child (such as nodding or shaking their head in response to questions from others).

Goals for children by age	
Ages	Goals
Younger infants	
Older infants	
Younger toddlers	
Older toddlers	
Preschoolers	
School age	
Goals for children with special needs	
Child name and age	Child’s individual goals



For an example of how to select goals for the children in your program, see the Examples section.

C. Tracking Children’s Growth Across Time (Ongoing Assessment)

It is important to track children’s growth across time to share progress with families, celebrate successes, and set new goals for the future. **Tracking children’s growth is different from screening.**

- **Screening** happens when children **first start in your program** to understand what their developmental levels are. You may repeat the screening process each year.
- **Tracking children’s growth** happens **regularly as part of everyday activities** so that you can see changes across time.
- You can **use your daily observations** and the **Massachusetts guidelines** to track children’s growth **across time**.



Check out the Head Start guides to observation for ideas on how to observe and track children’s growth over time.

- **Child Observation: The Heart of Individualizing Responsive Care for Infants and Toddlers:**
<https://www.headstart.gov/child-screening-assessment/child-observation-heart-individualizing-responsive-care-infants-toddlers/child-observation-heart-individualizing>

As you plan how to track children’s growth, think about how often you will track growth, **how you will keep track of growth across time**, and how you will communicate with families about children’s progress. You should plan to observe each child in your program and track their growth at least once a week. Plan to observe and track growth for different types of activities and skills each week so that you will have enough information to include in regular progress reports. For example, you might observe what children say during call-and-response songs one week, observe how tall of block tower children can build the next week, and observe how long it takes children to complete puzzles by themselves the next week.

Answer the questions in the following table to start planning how to track the growth of the children in your program across time. You may track growth differently for different goals.

Questions	Planning notes
When and how often do children have opportunities to practice these skills? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through everyday actions? • Through specific learning activities? 	
Do you plan to wait to observe children showing these skills on their own?	
When do you plan to give children an intentional opportunity to model these skills?	
How often will you make notes on children’s progress toward their goals? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?	
Where will you record observation notes?	



Questions	Planning notes
When will you communicate with families about their child’s progress? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?	
When and how will you know if a child needs help reaching their goal?	

Note: If you are unsure about which activities you will have in your program, complete this table after you have completed **Resource 4: Choosing Activities for Learning and Play**.



For an example of a form tracking a child’s growth across time, see the Examples section.



Examples

A. Interests, Areas of Growth, and Goals

The following examples have suggested goals from the [Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers](#) or the [Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences](#).

Child name and age	Child’s interests and areas for growth	Child’s individual goals
Marta 10 months old	Marta has recently started using a few words more rather than just pointing or reaching. She regularly says “Mama”, “Papa”, “up”, and “no” to express herself. When her family or I try to get her to say new words, such as “bottle,” she will repeat the word but then not use it again in the future. I will observe Marta to identify just one or two new words to repeat to her so she can add new words to her vocabulary more slowly and purposefully.	LC7: The older infant uses the same “words” consistently to express wants, needs, and thoughts.
Sofia 2.5 years old (30 months)	Sofia’s family shared that she is struggling with physical development, such as getting up by herself. Sofia’s family said that when she is sitting on the floor, she needs to have a chair or stool next to her to help pull herself up.	PW28. “Demonstrates large muscle balance, stability, control and coordination” <i>(Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants, p. 149).</i>
Marcus 4 years old (48 months)	Marcus has a hard time answering questions or communicating about his preferences or feelings. Marcus’s family said he speaks more when they explain that it is important and give him rewards for trying. I will suggest to Marcus’s family that it may be useful to talk to his doctor or get him assessed by an occupational therapist or speech therapist. I also will work to support Marcus to retain and recall information using the strategies on page 39 of the <i>Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences</i> .	SEL7. “Demonstrate the ability to communicates with others in a variety of ways” <i>(Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences, p. 25).</i> SL.PK.1. “Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners during daily routines and play” <i>(Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences, p. 66).</i>



Child name and age	Child’s interests and areas for growth	Child’s individual goals
Jackson 6 years old	Jackson still needs extra help writing his name and identifying letters correctly. Jackson’s parents said that he is more confident writing his name when he can look at an example, such as his name card on his cubby.	F.PK.1. “Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of printed and written text” (<i>Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences</i> , p. 54).

B. Using Learning Standards to Set Goals for Children by Age and Developmental Level

I have selected the following goals for the children in my program from the Massachusetts guidelines:

Ages	Goals	Suggested Activities
Younger infants	<input type="checkbox"/> SED2. “Develops a bond with both family and non-family members” (<i>Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants</i> , p. 20).	<input type="checkbox"/> Make eye contact with the infant during routine times such as feeding and diaper changing, while showing respect for cultural practices.
Older infants	<input type="checkbox"/> SED21. “Imitates both educators and peers frequently and in a variety of ways” (<i>Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants</i> , p. 25). <input type="checkbox"/> SED30. “Continues to demonstrate likes and dislikes” (<i>Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants</i> , p. 27).	<input type="checkbox"/> Play simple interactive games that encourage the infant to repeat actions, such as “Peek-a-Boo” and “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize refusal by a child and support them by allowing them to refuse something (e.g., “You must not like your peas because you are pushing them away. Do you want to try something else?”) <input type="checkbox"/> Continue to narrate older infant’s actions and encourage the use of new vocabulary.



Ages	Goals	Suggested Activities
Younger toddlers (12–24 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> CD54. “Shows interest in matching and sorting according to color, shape and size” (<i>Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants</i>, p. 131).<input type="checkbox"/> CD65. “Responds to and participates in music, rhythm and songs” (<i>Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants</i>, p. 137).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Put containers of various sizes in the sand and water tables.<input type="checkbox"/> Point to items when counting them aloud.<input type="checkbox"/> Sing songs as part of the daily routine (e.g., sing the “Clean Up” song or make up a tune for going outside).
Older toddlers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> CD57. “Matches and sorts according to color, shape or size” (<i>Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants</i>, p. 132).<input type="checkbox"/> CD62. “Asks questions and develops inquiry skills” (<i>Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants</i>, p. 135).<input type="checkbox"/> CD64. “Observes and identifies living things and begins to identify their basic needs” (<i>Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants</i>, p. 136).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Provide a variety of shapes for the older toddler to manipulate or fitting shapes into the correct locations (e.g., blocks, puzzles, shape sorters)<input type="checkbox"/> Seek out interesting items for the older toddler that they may not have had experience with previously. Narrate their actions while modeling questions, “Why does that block not fit there? Is it too big?”<input type="checkbox"/> Plan walking field trips to area parks, pet stores, and flower shops. Talk about what is needed to feed and care for the living things. Observe a tree or plant in the yard across the seasons.



Ages	Goals	Suggested Activities
Preschoolers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> RL.PK.7. “With prompting and support, make predictions about what happens next in a picture book after examining and discussing the illustrations” (<i>Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences</i>, p. 46). <input type="checkbox"/> F-PK-1-D (MA) “Recognize and name some uppercase letters of the alphabet and the lowercase letters in one’s own name.” (<i>Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences</i>, p. 58). <input type="checkbox"/> PreK-ESS2-6 (MA). “Provide examples of the impact of weather on living things” (<i>Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences</i>, p. 104). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage children to make and check predictions about a story before, during, and after reading. “What do you think will happen?” <input type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunities for children to see and make their name, including checking off their name on a sign up sheet, making their name from letter cards or shapes, and practice copying letters in their name or their whole name. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunities to follow a consistent route for nature walks as the seasons change and collect evidence or take photographs of the impact of seasonal changes or weather (e.g., snow, rain, wind, ice, sunshine) on leaves, flowers, grass, trees, birds, or animals and/or on the behavior of birds/animals in the local environment.

C. Tracking Children’s Growth Across Time (Ongoing Assessment)

Here is an example of a form tracking a child’s growth across time.

Child’s Name: Ben Marsh. **Date of Birth:** October 8, 2020. **Date of Report:** March 30, 2024

What has the child learned or started to do in the last 3–6 months? Ben can recognize most shapes, colors, and numbers up to 10. Ben has started learning and repeating a lot of new words he hears from adults (e.g., “fabulous,” “gigantic”). He loves building block towers and knocking them down. Ben also is learning how to put on his jacket by himself and only needs help sometimes.

What do you expect the child to start learning or doing in the next 3–6 months? I am encouraging Ben to practice writing his name on his artwork and recognize the letters from his name in the world (such as looking for the letter “B” in books). I also will keep encouraging Ben to put on his jacket and shoes by himself.



How can the child’s family help reinforce or develop new skills at home? It would be great if Ben could practice noticing letters with his family (in books, on street signs, etc.) and learning letter sounds at home.

Additional Resources



Some examples of formative assessments are as follows:

- **Tools for Teachers: Classroom Activities Assessment Checklist.** You can use this checklist to list your goals for an activity and check off which children demonstrated that they met the goals. The examples in this checklist align with goals from the Massachusetts guidelines for social and emotional development. (<https://headstart.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/collecting-and-using-information/checklist-teacher-tools-activity.pdf>)
- **Tools for Teachers: Skill Assessment Checklist.** You can use this checklist to track and describe how a child demonstrates skills over time. (<https://headstart.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/collecting-and-using-information/checklist-teacher-tools-skill.pdf>)