

Early Childhood Referrals and Assessment Through Play

Days of Play, June 2026

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Objectives

- Review developmentally appropriate expectations for PK3 students.
- Explore state guidance and milestones.
- Learn strategies for sharing information effectively with families.
- Explore ways to assess student skills through play.

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Developmentally Appropriate Practices for PK3

What is the purpose of Pre-K?



TEA supports high-quality prekindergarten that is developmentally appropriate, multi-sensory, and experiential. Young children thrive when provided a learning environment that inspires curiosity, builds confidence, and fosters a love of learning.

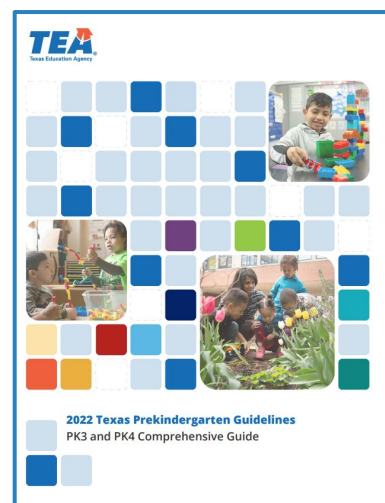
[ECE Family Resources](#)



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Pre-K Guidelines

- Designed to help educators identify the types of knowledge and skills that are typical of PK aged children
- There is considerable variability in development among children
- Intended to help with implementing effective instructional practices and learning experiences
- Designed as a resource to inform decisions that pertain to curriculum and instruction



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Looking at the Layout

Introductory Paragraph

Knowledge Statements

Skills Statements

Featured Examples of Child Behaviors

I. Social and Emotional Development Domain

While a prekindergarten education should include activities that strengthen cognitive skills, it must also provide for the development of the social and emotional competencies required for school readiness and success in life. The development of these personal and social skills enables children to build a sense of who they are and what they can do. Supportive, positive relationships between teachers and children are essential to implementing effective practices that support a child's social and emotional development. Children must establish positive relationships with adults and peers to participate effectively in the classroom community, assert independence in appropriate ways, and accomplish tasks that are meaningful to them without infringing on the rights of others. Children who can follow directions, communicate their wants, and needs effectively, and get along with other children are better prepared for kindergarten and beyond.

Early experiences influence brain development by establishing the neural connections that provide the foundation for language, reasoning, problem solving, social skills, behavior, and emotional health. Daily experiences such as transitioning from home to school, sharing a space or materials, resolving conflicts, and demonstrating empathy contribute to a child's social and emotional development. However, children benefit from direct instruction and repeated opportunities to practice these skills.

The Social and Emotional Development Domain of the *Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines* is divided into the following skills: self-concept, self-regulation, relationships with others, and social awareness.

A. Self-Concept

Central to understanding emotional development is the idea of self-concept: an ever-increasing level of conscious awareness of one's feelings, thoughts, abilities, likes, and dislikes, as well as awareness of one's body in space. Prekindergarten children's emerging ability to perceive these aspects of themselves at a conscious level distinguishes them from toddlers, who lack such awareness. Children begin to generate multiple responses to the question "Who am I?" which is an essential step in becoming competent in relationships such as self-control and social/friendship skills. A rich, diverse, and inclusive cultural and linguistic environment in the prekindergarten environment is one that provides public opportunities for children to explore the uniqueness of their own bodies. Language as well as art and play can be used to explore differences from their own. Educators must model the mindset of "I am different, but I am an asset in the classroom, school, and community."

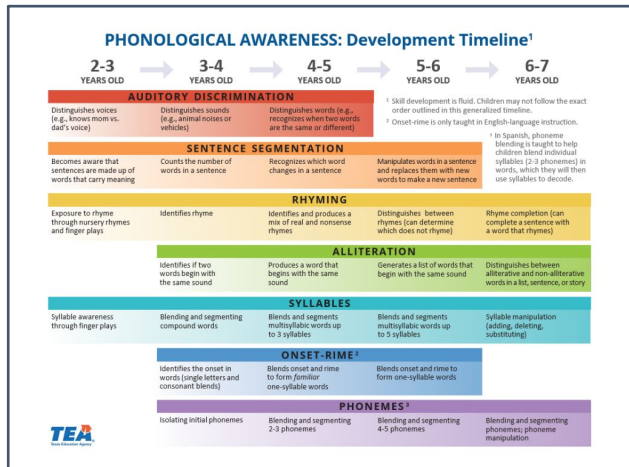
PK3 Outcome	PK4 Outcome
PK3.I.A.1 Child is building competence in controlling own body movements.	PK4.I.A.1 Child is aware of where own body is in space and respects personal boundaries.

The child may:

- stay in designated personal spaces without intruding upon others (e.g., stays in own seat at lunch table without kicking feet or leaning against neighboring children or stays seated on assigned space during whole group instruction without distracting others)
- move around the classroom without stepping on materials or disrupting others' activities
- maintain appropriate personal space when speaking with others

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PKG Appendix



EARLY CHILDHOOD WRITING DEVELOPMENT

(page 3 of 4)



Early Emergent Stage		
<p>GRIP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts five-finger grip including a grasp with index finger and thumb <p>EXAMPLE: A five-finger grip</p>	<p>FORMATION & SPELLING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrabbles begin to indicate the child's understanding of basic writing conventions - left to right, top to bottom Makes letter-like forms and shapes, or individual letters, to represent words Attempts to write name Copies letters and words from environmental print <p>EXAMPLE: Scrabbles with letter-like forms</p>	<p>COMPOSITION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses drawings across several pages to represent a clear message Includes story elements into drawings (e.g., character names, setting) to represent a story Adds meaningful labels to illustrations demonstrating the understanding that written words add meaning and context Shares meaning of pictures and labels with teachers and peers with consistency Starts to build awareness that messages (stories or individual pictures) need to make sense and will revise drawings and/or labels to make it happen
Emergent Stage		
<p>GRIP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses static three-finger grip and whole arm movement to form letters (lacks control) <p>EXAMPLE: A static three-finger grip, that uses the whole arm to make marks on the paper (and limits control)</p>	<p>FORMATION & SPELLING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strings random letters together in an attempt to create words Includes both upper and lowercase letters randomly Continues to develop conventions of writing - writes across the page, adds spaces to represent each word within a sentence <p>EXAMPLE: All caps "My food"</p>	<p>COMPOSITION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops stories with a beginning and an ending, represented by drawings and corresponding phrases Continues to develop conventions of writing - stories follow a logical sequence Revises drawings and writings to ensure their message is clear to their audience <p>EXAMPLE: A story about a student's feelings</p>

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ECE Best Practices Page

Early Childhood Students need...

- Responsive adults
- Organized environment
- Consistent routines
- Structure
- Opportunities for play
- Gradual release model

Early Childhood Education Best Practices



Planned | Purposeful | Playful



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Check your Knowledge

How long are PK3 students expected to attend to whole group, teacher-led instruction?

- A. 10-15 minutes
- B. 30 minutes
- C. 45 minutes
- D. PK students are not expected to attend to whole group instruction



PK3 Outcome	PK4 Outcome
PK3.1.B.3.b Child remains focused on engaging, teacher-led group activities for up to 10-15 minutes at a time.	PK4.1.B.3.b Child remains focused on engaging, teacher-led group activities for up to 20 minutes.



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Check your Knowledge

Center time should be...

- A. Teacher choice
- B. Child-directed
- C. Timed rotations

“(E)ngagement in learning centers should be freely chosen (e.g., “free choice”) by the child, uninterrupted, and should include the use of a wide variety of materials to support meaningful learning.”

[Early Childhood Best Practices - Learning Centers](#)



Check your Knowledge

What activities do you expect to see in a high quality pre-k class?

- A. Free-choice drawing and writing activities
- B. Letter tracing on teacher-prepared worksheet
- C. Adults assisting children with intense emotions
- D. Digital media used for the entirety of whole group

PK3 Outcome	PK4 Outcome
PK3.IV.A.1 Child engages in free-choice drawing and writing activities.	PK4.IV.A.1 Child intentionally uses marks, letters, or symbols to record language and verbally shares meaning.
PK3 Outcome	PK4 Outcome
PK3.I.I.B.2.c Child manages intensity of emotions with adult assistance.	PK4.I.I.B.2.c Child is able to manage intensity of emotions more consistently, although adult guidance is sometimes necessary.



Check your Knowledge

By the end of pre-k, students should be able to...

- A. Name the months of the year
- B. Name the days of the week
- C. Describe the passage of time within a day
- D. Identify the season

"[PK students] may not have the ability to judge the length of time across days, weeks, or months. What children are able to comprehend is the ability to understand time as it occurs within the immediate school day.

[Early Childhood Best Practices - Daily Schedules](#)



Communicating with Families

Your child at 3 years

Child's Name _____

Child's Age _____

Today's Date _____

Milestones matter! How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves offers important clues about his or her development. Check the milestones your child has reached by age 3. Take this with you and talk with your child's doctor at every well-child visit about the milestones your child has reached and what to expect next.



What most children do by this age:

Social/Emotional Milestones

- Calms down within 10 minutes after you leave her, like at a childcare drop off
- Notices other children and joins them to play

Language/Communication Milestones

- Talks with you in conversation using at least two back-and-forth exchanges
- Asks "who," "what," "where," or "why" questions, like "Where is mommy/daddy?"
- Says what action is happening in a picture or book when asked, like "running," "sitting," or "playing"
- Says first name, when asked
- Talks well enough for others to understand, most of the time

Cognitive Milestones (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Draws a circle, when you show him how
- Avoids touching hot objects, like a stove, when you warn her

Movement/Physical Development Milestones

- Strings items together, like large beads or macaroni
- Puts on some clothes by himself, like loose pants or a jacket
- Uses a fork

Other important things to share with the doctor...

- What are some things you and your child do together?
- What are some things your child likes to do?
- Is there anything your child does or does not do that concerns you?
- Has your child lost any skills he/she once had?
- Does your child have any special healthcare needs or was he/she born prematurely?

You know your child best. Don't wait. If your child is not meeting one or more milestones, has lost skills he or she once had, or you have other concerns, act early. Talk with your child's doctor, share your concerns, and ask about developmental screening. If you or the doctor are still concerned:

1. Ask for a referral to a specialist who can evaluate your child more; and
2. Call any local public elementary school for a free evaluation to find out if your child can get services to help.

For more on how to help your child, visit cdc.gov/Concerned.

Don't wait.
Acting early can make
a real difference!



Developmental Milestone Checklist

[English](#) | [Spanish](#)



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Your child at 4 years

Child's Name _____

Child's Age _____

Today's Date _____

Milestones matter! How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves offers important clues about his or her development. Check the milestones your child has reached by age 4. Take this with you and talk with your child's doctor at every well-child visit about the milestones your child has reached and what to expect next.



What most children do by this age:

Social/Emotional Milestones

- Pretends to be something else during play (teacher, superhero, dog)
- Asks to go play with children if none are around, like "Can I play with Alex?"
- Comforts others who are hurt or sad, like hugging a crying friend
- Avoids danger, like not jumping from tall heights at the playground
- Likes to be a "helper"
- Changes behavior based on where she is (place of worship, library, playground)

Language/Communication Milestones

- Says sentences with four or more words
- Says some words from a song, story, or nursery rhyme
- Talks about at least one thing that happened during his day, like "I played soccer."
- Answers simple questions like "What is a coat for?" or "What is a crayon for?"

Cognitive Milestones (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Names a few colors of items
- Tells what comes next in a well-known story
- Draws a person with three or more body parts

Movement/Physical Development Milestones

- Catches a large ball most of the time
- Serves himself food or pours water, with adult supervision
- Unbuttons some buttons
- Holds crayon or pencil between fingers and thumb (not a fist)

Other important things to share with the doctor...

- What are some things you and your child do together?
- What are some things your child likes to do?
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Developmental Milestone Checklist

[English](#) | [Spanish](#)



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Prekindergarten 3 Understanding What Your Child Will Learn

Prekindergarten 3 will be a fun and engaging experience for your child. Your child will learn many skills which will lay a foundation for future learning. Below is a summary of what your child will learn this school year.



Language & Literacy

Listen

- **Learning Goals:** Follow two or three step directions during activities such as setting the table, playing, or cleaning up. Have short conversations with expected words and phrases.
- **Learning Strategies:** Play games with multiple steps. Listen to stories and directions from adults. Play with friends.

Write

- **Learning Goals:** Make scribbles, line marks, and letter-like forms when asked to write.
- **Learning Strategies:** Use a variety of writing and drawing materials such as different types of pens, crayons, markers, or paintbrushes. Play with letter blocks, magnets, and other reading materials.

Read

- **Learning Goals:** Enjoy being read to and exploring books. Name familiar characters or events from books. Guess what happens next in a story.
- **Learning Strategies:** Participate in story time and choose their own books. Point out familiar letters and words such as labels, logos, or street signs.

Speak

- **Learning Goals:** Ask questions and wait for answers. Use many words when speaking about feelings, places, people, or things.
- **Learning Strategies:** Have conversations with friends and adults. Play games with friends. Read books out loud.



Physical Development

Fine Motor

- **Learning Goals:** Squeeze small objects between thumb and forefinger. Draw shapes and write some letters and numbers. Dress and undress with little help.
- **Learning Strategies:** Play with clay and play dough. Use tools such as tongs, clothespins, or safety scissors. Write and draw with a variety of pens, markers, pencils, and crayons. Make art with materials of different textures.

Gross Motor

- **Learning Goals:** Hop, skip, jump, and gallop. Climb jungle gyms. Ride a tricycle.
- **Learning Strategies:** Play games with a variety of movements. Play outside.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DIVISION



PK3 Parent Guide

[English](#) | [Spanish](#)



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Prekindergarten 4 Understanding What Your Child Will Learn

Prekindergarten will be a fun and engaging experience for your child. Your child will learn many skills which will lay a foundation for future learning. Below is a summary of what your child will learn in Prekindergarten. More information can be found by reviewing the *Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines*. The guidelines are what all public schools in Texas use as a basis for what they teach students.



Language & Literacy

Listen

- **Learning Goals:** Follow two or three step directions during activities such as setting the table, playing games, or cleaning up. Have conversations with expected words and responses.
- **Learning Strategies:** Play games with multiple steps. Play in large and small groups. Listen to stories and directions.

Write

- **Learning Goals:** Use marks or letters to write.
- **Learning Strategies:** Use writing materials in multiple areas of the classroom, such as creating signs in block play or grocery lists in the pretend play center. Write in a journal and make books or drawings with words.

Read

- **Learning Goals:** Enjoy being read to and exploring books. Name rhyming words.
- **Learning Strategies:** Play games with multiple steps. Play in large and small groups. Listen to stories and directions.

Speak

- **Learning Goals:** Ask and respond to questions. Use many words when speaking about feelings, people, places, or things.
- **Learning Strategies:** Have conversations with friends and teachers. Play games with friends. Read books out loud.



Physical Development

Fine Motor

- **Learning Goals:** Use tools such as forks, spoons, tweezers, clothespins, or paintbrushes with ease. Dress and undress without help. Draw shapes and write letters and numbers.
- **Learning Strategies:** Play with clay or play dough. Write and draw with different types of writing and art materials such as pens, pencils, paint brushes or crayons. Make art by tearing paper, using cookie cutters, or stringing beads.

Gross Motor

- **Learning Goals:** Stand on one foot. Hop, skip, jog, jump, and gallop. Carry a bowl or plate of food from one spot to another.
- **Learning Strategies:** Play games with many movements. Help with meal times. Play outside.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DIVISION



PK4 Parent Guide

[English](#) | [Spanish](#)



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When You Have Concerns: A Parent's Guide to Special Education Referrals for Children Ages 3-5

Concerned About Your Child's Learning?

If your child is between the ages of 3 through 5 and you're concerned about their development or learning, early intervention can make all the difference.

Examples of Concerns:

- Your child is not speaking as much as other children their age.
- Your child has difficulty understanding simple instructions.
- Your child has trouble interacting with other children or adults.
- Other people have difficulty understanding what your child says.

The Child Find process is a required part of a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that ensures all children with disabilities, from birth through age 21, are identified, located, and evaluated to determine their need for special education and related services.

This process is important for identifying and supporting children ages 3 through 5 who may have developmental delays or disabilities, ensuring they get the early intervention they need to thrive.

If you have concerns about your child's growth or learning, **contact the special education director at your local school district** for more information regarding the Child Find process. You can ask – **"How do I request a special education evaluation?"**

Need Help Locating Your Local School District?

The [Texas School District Locator \(SDL\)](#) provides basic information for Texas schools, districts, and education service centers (ESCs) in map format. Click the link or scan this QR code and enter your address in the "find address or place" box.



What if my child is under 3 years old?

For children 3 years old and under, Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a statewide program administered by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) for families with children from birth to 36 months with developmental delays, disabilities, or certain medical diagnoses that may impact development. ECI services support families as they learn how to help their children grow and learn. Visit HHSC's [ECI website](#) for referrals and support.



Parent's Guide to Special Education Referrals for Children Ages 3-5

[English](#) | [Spanish](#)



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Family Conference Role Play



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Scenario 1

Ava is a 4 year old student in PK. Her teacher reports:

- She enjoys story time but often wanders away from circle time.
- She has difficulty following multi-step directions.
- She gets frustrated with transitions, especially during centers.



Ava’s parents worry that she isn’t ready for kindergarten. They mention that she “doesn’t listen” and “doesn’t sit still.”

Validate concerns	Explain developmental milestones	Share school expectations	Explain referral process	Offer next steps
I know you have noticed things about Ava that you are worried about.	At 4 years old, it is common for children to need reminders to stay with the group or finish a task.	The PK4 program builds skills for school readiness like relationships, self-regulation, and early literacy.	If you still have concerns as the year goes on, we can discuss a special education referral.	For now, let’s keep close communication with her teacher. I will check in again in a few weeks.

Scenario 2

You are meeting with the parents of Mateo, a 3-year-old who just started PK3. His teacher reports:

- Mateo speaks in short 2–3 word phrases.
- He enjoys parallel play but struggles to join in group play.
- Fine motor tasks (holding crayons, using scissors) are difficult.
- He often gets frustrated when asked to follow two-step directions.



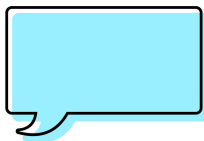
The parents are concerned that Mateo is “behind” and want to know if he needs special education right away.



With a partner...

Role A: Teacher

Use the resources we have discussed today to frame your conversation.



Role B: Family Member

Ask questions, express concern, and react as a caregiver might.



You are meeting with the parents of Mateo, a 3-year-old who just started PK3. His teacher reports:

- Mateo speaks in short 2–3 word phrases.
- He enjoys parallel play but struggles to join in group play.
- Fine motor tasks (holding crayons, using scissors) are difficult.
- He often gets frustrated when asked to follow two-step directions.

The parents are concerned that Mateo is “behind” and want to know if he needs special education right away.

Validate concerns

Explain developmental milestones

Share school expectations

Explain referral process

Offer next steps

Validate Concerns

I hear that...

you've been paying close attention to your child.

It's normal to wonder if your child is where they should be at this age.



Explain Developmental Milestones

At this age, many children...

are starting to use short phrases and sentences, just like your child.

Parallel play- playing next to another child - is very typical at this age.

Three year olds are still developing skills like cutting with scissors and drawing.

Your child at 3 years

Milestones matter! How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves offers important clues about his or her development. Check the milestones your child has reached by age 3. Take this with you and talk with your child's doctor at every well-child visit about the milestones your child has reached and what to expect next.

What most children do by this age:

- Social/Emotional Milestones**
 - Can play alone when 10 minutes after you leave her for at a childcare day off
 - Invites other children and joins them to play
- Language/Communication Milestones**
 - Talks with you in conversation using at least two back-and-forth exchanges
 - Asks "who," "what," "where," or "why" questions, like "Where is mommy's key?"
 - Says what action is happening in a picture or book when asked, like "running," "sitting," or "drinking"
 - Says first name, when asked
 - Talks well enough for others to understand, most of the time
- Cognitive Milestones (Learning, thinking, problem-solving)**
 - Draws a circle, when you show him how
 - Events something he expects, like a movie, when you warn her
- Movement/Physical Development Milestones**
 - Strings items together, like large beads or marbles
 - Runs on some clothes by himself, like loose pants or a jacket
 - Climbs a box

Other important things to share with the doctor...

- What are some things you and your child do together?
- What are some things your child likes to do?
- Is there anything your child does or does not do that concerns you?
- Has your child lost any skills he/she once had?
- Does your child have any special healthcare needs, or was he/she born prematurely?

You know your child best. Don't wait. If your child is not meeting one or more milestones, has lost skills she or she once had, or you have other concerns, act early. Talk with your child's doctor, share your concerns, and ask about developmental screening. If you or the doctor are still concerned:

- Ask for a referral to a specialist who can evaluate your child more.
- Call any local public elementary school for a free evaluation to find out if your child can get services to help.

For more on how to help your child, visit cdc.gov/parents.

Don't wait. Acting early can make a real difference!

Logos: CDC, Texas Department of Health, American Academy of Pediatrics



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Share School Expectations

PK is about...

building a foundation - this is where children learn how to learn.

Classroom activities focus on language, social skills, and self regulation.

The classroom uses play-based learning, so children practice these skills in ways that are natural for them.

TEA
Texas Education Agency

2022 Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines
PK3 and PK4 Comprehensive Guide

Prekindergarten 3
Understanding What Your Child Will Learn

Prekindergarten 3 will be a fun and engaging experience for your child. Your child will learn many skills which will be a foundation for future learning. Below is a summary of what your child will learn this school year.

Language & Literacy

Listen

- Learning Goals:** Follow two or three step directions during activities such as getting the table, playing or sharing for their play experience.
- Learning Strategies:** Listen with respect and attention.
- Learning Strategies:** Play games with multiple steps. Listen to stories and directions from adults. Play with friends.

Read

- Learning Goals:** Enjoy being read to and exploring books. Name familiar characters or events in books. Respond when requested to name.
- Learning Strategies:** Participate in story time and discuss their own books. Share our favorite stories and words such as letters, signs, or short signs.

Write

- Learning Goals:** Make scribbles, line marks, and letter-like forms when asked to write.
- Learning Strategies:** Use a variety of writing and drawing materials such as different types of pens, markers, markers or pencils, play with letter blocks, magnets, and other writing materials.

Speak

- Learning Goals:** Ask questions and ask for answers. Use easy words when speaking about first and second grade work.
- Learning Strategies:** Play games with friends, hand books and read.

Physical Development

Fine Motor

- Learning Goals:** Separate small objects between thumb and forefinger. Show shapes and name some letters and numbers. Draw and address.
- Learning Strategies:** Play with clay and play dough. Use tools such as string, ladders, pins, or push pins. Write and draw with markers and pens, markers, pencils, and crayons. Make art with materials of different textures.

Gross Motor

- Learning Goals:** Hop, skip, jump, and gallop. Climb up and down.
- Learning Strategies:** Play games with a variety of equipment. Play outside.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR DIVISION

TEA



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Explain the Referral Process

If concerns continue...

One option is a special education referral. That means we would do more in-depth evaluations to better understand your child's strengths and needs.

This guide explains your rights and what support is available.



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Offering Next Steps

We will...

keep monitoring and check in with you regularly so you are never out of the loop.

You can...

use these resources at home to give your child more changes to practice those skills.



Circle Activity Collection: Family

The **Circle Activity Collection: Family** translates child development research into practice by providing a variety of hands-on activities that **families can do at home**. This collection is organized around seven learning domains: **Language & Communication, Reading & Writing, Math, Science, Social & Emotional, Physical Development, and Art & Sensory**.

English Activities
Start finding Activities in English to do with your children.
[Click here to find activities!](#)

Actividades en español
Empieza a buscar actividades en español para hacer con tus hijos.
[Para ver las actividades, haga clic aquí.](#)



Assessment Through Play



Daily routine items



Fine and Gross Motor



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Art materials



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Dramatic Play



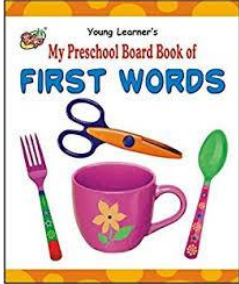
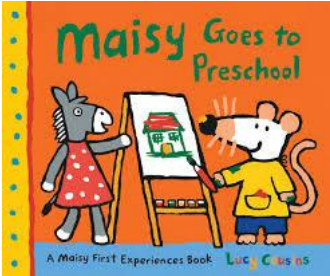
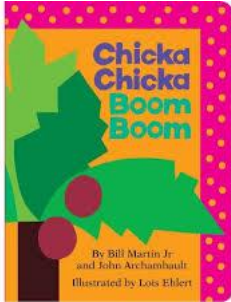
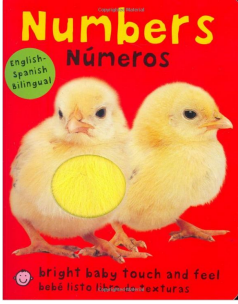
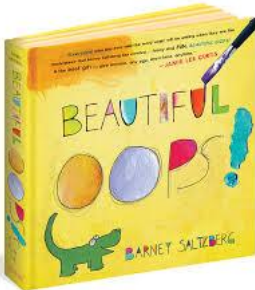
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Construction



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Books



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Sensory Toys

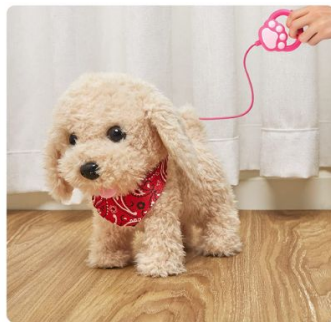


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Manipulatives



Cause and Effect Toys



Play Assessment Checklist

EARLY LITERACY					
Skill	PK3 Outcome	PK4 Outcome	Kindergarten TEKS	Look For...	Evidence Observed
Interest in Books & Stories	PK3.III.A.1 <i>Demonstrates interest in pictures, text, and stories read aloud.</i>	PK4.III.A.1 <i>Demonstrates increasing interest in books and stories.</i>	K ELAR 2	<i>Chooses books, attends during read-alouds, discusses stories.</i>	<i>Example: During cleanup, student put away materials and transitioned to circle time after one teacher reminder.</i>
Story Comprehension	PK3.III.D <i>Retells or reenacts familiar stories with support.</i>	PK4.III.D <i>Retells or reenacts familiar stories independently.</i>	K ELAR 2, 3	<i>Retells events, identifies characters, reenacts stories.</i>	
Emergent Writing	PK3.IV.A <i>Demonstrates interest in writing.</i>	PK4.IV.A <i>Uses writing materials intentionally.</i>	K ELAR 6	<i>Draws, scribbles purposefully, creates messages.</i>	
Name Writing	PK3.IV.C <i>Begins to write letters or name-like forms.</i>	PK4.IV.C <i>Writes own name using recognizable letters.</i>	K ELAR 6	<i>Writes name, letter-like forms, environmental print.</i>	



Ask Me Anything!



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Always United.**

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