

An Introduction for Parents to the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks



Learn how you can use the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks to help your child be successful in school and life.







Washington State Department of
Early Learning






Why was this booklet created?

This booklet was created as a companion to the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks. Inside this booklet, parents can learn:

-  What are the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks?
-  How can I get a copy of the Benchmarks?
-  How does my child grow and learn?
-  What are everyday things I can do to help my child grow up safe, healthy and with a love of learning?

The full Benchmarks document is available at www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/BenchmarksColor.pdf or by calling 1.866.482.4325

What are the Benchmarks?

-  The Benchmarks are early learning guidelines that describe what children typically know and are able to do at different ages from birth to entry into kindergarten.
-  The Benchmarks do not list everything most children can do in each age group. Rather, the Benchmarks are examples of skills and behaviors you might expect to see as your child grows older.
-  The Benchmarks give examples of simple activities you can do to support your child's learning and development at different ages. **YOU** are your child's first and most important teacher!



Why are the Benchmarks a good tool for me and my child?

The Benchmarks are based on 20 years of research on how young children learn and develop and what helps children reach their full potential. We know that:

- 1 Children begin learning at birth. They learn through play and exploration.
- 2 Children learn and develop by interacting with you, and with the things around them. You are one of your child's favorite playmates.
- 3 You can do many things in your everyday life to help children learn and develop.
- 4 Many ordinary activities can help learning.
- 5 Family traditions, languages, and cultural activities support children's learning and development.
- 6 Children develop skills at their own speeds.
- 7 Some children have health care needs or disabilities that affect how and when they learn and develop.
- 8 Beyond learning facts like numbers and letters, children need to learn many social skills and behaviors to help them be successful in school.

How a child learns and grows

The Benchmarks are organized around five areas of development commonly used to describe how children learn and grow. They are each described briefly below. The five areas are closely related to each other. For example, how well a child has learned to talk and communicate affects how he or she approaches learning new things.

Physical Well-Being, Health, and Motor Development

Children's physical health and ability to participate in daily activities.

Social and Emotional Development

Children's ability to handle their own emotions and have positive relationships at home, at school, and in the community.

Approaches Toward Learning

Children's approaches to learning new skills, including being curious, sticking with tasks, being creative, paying attention, and thinking about what they've just learned.

Cognition and General Knowledge

Children's ability to think about and understand the world around them, including knowledge about people, places, and things, math concepts, and ways to solve problems using logic and what they already know.

Language, Literacy, and Communication

Children's use of language, reading, and writing skills, and their ability to communicate.

How can I use the Benchmarks?

You are your child's most important teacher. The Benchmarks can help you:






- 🕒 To better understand how children learn and develop as babies and young children.
- 👋 To learn about what young children usually know and are able to do at different ages.
- ⚠️ To find ideas for daily activities to help your child develop and learn.
- 📄 To help you notice when your child might be developing differently from most children, and make it easier to talk with a doctor, teacher, or other professional if you have any concerns about a child's development or behavior.



You can help your child learn and grow every day.


Everyday moments are a great time to help your child learn and grow. Here are two examples how a simple daily activity can help your child grow and learn. The related developmental areas are listed after each example.


Reading or showing books to your child


-  Sitting on your lap, a child holds his head up, looks at the pictures, listens to your voice, and begins to try to turn pages with his fingers.
[Physical Well-Being, Health, and Motor Development](#)
-  Being held helps a child feel close to you, knowing that you want to read with her.
[Social and Emotional Development](#)
-  A child enjoys choosing a book and deciding when to turn the pages.
[Approaches Toward Learning](#)
-  Reading shows a child how wonderful books are and all they can teach him.
[Cognition and General Knowledge](#)
-  Reading with a child helps her learn words and stories and begin to understand that the words on the page mean something.
[Language, Literacy, and Communication](#)





Walking and talking with your child

-  Going on short daily walks develops a child's strength and coordination, and helps him be physically healthy.
Physical Well-Being, Health, and Motor Development

-  Listening with interest to what a child says and helping add more details to what she is saying helps her develop trust and comfort with familiar adults.
Social and Emotional Development

-  Asking open-ended questions about what you see on the walk such as "What do you think clouds are made of?" or "What if humans could fly?" encourages his creativity and curiosity.
Approaches Toward Learning

-  Having a child describe and compare the color, size, and shape of things you see on your walks develops her thinking and observation skills.
Cognition and General Knowledge

-  Taking turns naming things you see helps increase the number of words a child knows.
Language, Literacy, and Communication

What can my child and I do together?

As a parent, you are your child's first and most important teacher. Help your child understand that learning is fun! Here are examples of ways to help your child learn skills in each area of development as your child grows.





The suggested activities come from the full Benchmarks document. These activities, and many others, can be found in the Benchmarks on the pages listed.

Physical Well-Being, Health, and Motor Development

Developing fine motor skills (pages 22-23)





- ☉ Play hand games with your child such as clapping and peek-a-boo (birth to 18 months).
- ☉ Let your child scribble using crayons, chalk and large pencils (18 months to 3 years).
- ☉ Help your child practice tying shoelaces, buttoning clothes and stringing beads (3 to 5 years).
- ☉ Help your child learn to do things like setting the table, making food and sorting buttons (5 years to kindergarten entry).

Developing the use of senses to guide motions (pages 24-25)

-  Let your child play with toys and objects of various textures, shapes, colors, smells and sounds (birth to 18 months).
-  Catch and throw different objects together, like large, soft balls and beanbags (18 months to 3 years).
-  Play word games and sing songs that use the body, such as “Follow the Leader” (3 to 5 years).
-  Play games that involve eye-hand coordination such as hitting a ball with a bat (5 years to kindergarten entry).

Social and Emotional Development

Developing trust and comfort with adults (pages 46-47)

-  Always comfort and reassure your child when she is upset or worried, or seems to need you (birth to 18 months).
-  Listen with interest to what your child says and help him add more details or ideas (18 months to 3 years).
-  Let your child know how much you like her behavior when she is doing positive things with you (3 to 5 years).
-  Talk with your child about his feelings (5 years to kindergarten entry).



Developing cooperation with friends (pages 52-53)

- 👉 Play turn-taking games with your child such as peek-a-boo (birth to 18 months).
- 👉 Find toys that can be played and shared with two or more children at one time (18 months to 3 years).
- 👉 Praise your child for getting along well with others (3 to 5 years).
- 👉 Look for opportunities for your child to help others, such as helping at a community garden (5 years to kindergarten entry).



Approaches Toward Learning

Developing curiosity and interest (pages 82-83)

- ▶ Play with your child every day (birth to 18 months).
- ▶ Make the places where your child spends time safe and fun to explore (18 months to 3 years).
- ▶ Help your child explore and learn about your family's culture, community and about other cultures (3 to 5 years).
- ▶ Help your child learn more about the things he is interested in by getting library books on a favorite topic or taking your child places where he can learn more. (5 years to kindergarten entry).

Developing learning from experiences (pages 90-91)

- ▶ Play together with toys and objects that react to specific actions like shaking or squeezing (birth to 18 months).
- ▶ “Think out loud” with your child about ideas (18 months to 3 years).
- ▶ Ask open-ended questions that encourage reflection, such as “How else could you do this?” (3 to 5 years).
- ▶ Give your child opportunities to share her experiences such as a story time (5 years to kindergarten entry).

Cognition and General Knowledge

Developing use of past knowledge to build new knowledge (pages 100-101)

- ▣ Provide toys and objects that have different colors, shapes, and textures, and that respond to the actions of your child such as rattles, squeeze toys, cloth toys, and soft balls (birth to 18 months).
- ▣ Talk with your child about the things you do every day. Explain “why” we do things such as “Why do we vacuum the floor? To clean up the dirt” (18 months to 3 years).
- ▣ Help your child make connections with past learning and events by playing “Do you remember when...?” games and talking about things that have happened in the past (3 to 5 years).
- ▣ Invite your child to tell you more; for example, say to your child: “Tell me more about why you said that” (5 years to kindergarten entry).

Developing knowledge of numbers and counting (pages 108 -109)

- ❑ Sing songs and read books with numbers and counting (birth to 18 months).
- ❑ Use numbers in everyday routines, such as asking your child if he would like one or two more pieces of something (18 months to 3 years).
- ❑ Play card or board games together that use counting (3 to 5 years).
- ❑ Guess the number of objects in a box, then count them out loud together (5 years to kindergarten entry).

Language, Communication, and Literacy

Developing listening skills (pages 162-163)

- 🕒 Tell your child stories, sing songs, and recite rhymes using family traditions and languages (birth to 18 months).
- 🕒 Help your child talk on the telephone and learn to listen to the person on the other end (18 months to 3 years).
- 🕒 Talk with your child about pictures in books, magazines and catalogs (3 to 5 years).
- 🕒 Create times when your child can listen to other children in a group setting (5 years to kindergarten entry).



Developing vocabulary (pages 154-155)

- 🕒 Spend time talking and reading together (birth to 18 months).
- 🕒 Help him try new words by starting a sentence and asking him to finish it (18 months to 3 years).
- 🕒 Use jokes, rhymes, songs and other methods to expand language use (3 to 5 years).
- 🕒 Explain the benefits of learning new languages and compare words from different languages with your child (5 years to kindergarten entry).

Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks

To get a copy of the Benchmarks:

Call the Department of Early Learning to order a free copy at: 1.866.482.4325
or visit the DEL Web site at:

www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/BenchmarksColor.pdf

Go to www.del.wa.gov for more information on how to help your child grow up healthy, safe and with a love of learning.

Questions about your child's development? Talk to your pediatrician or call toll-free:

- The Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Program Family Health Hotline, 1.800.322.2588
- The Parent Trust for Washington Children Family Help Line, 1.800.932.HOPE (4673)



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The Washington State Department of Early Learning

We at the Department of Early Learning (DEL) work every day to help Washington's children get ready for school and life. Our work focuses on children's earliest years. We offer information and resources for children's first and most important teachers—parents—as well as others who care for and teach young children.

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