EARLY CHILDHOOD
AN OFFICE OF LDOE

# Early Childhood Developmental Screening Guidebook

## Introduction

The Developmental Screening Guidebook is designed as a reference guide on how to best support healthy growth and development of children in your care throughout key developmental intervals and identify children who may benefit from specialized support. Early childhood program staff, service providers, health care systems, families, and communities all play important roles in providing support and services to young children during this critical developmental period. The resources within this guide are intended to help program staff deepen their understanding of how children develop, regardless of their individual needs, and establish a comprehensive early identification system.

### Why is Early Identification So Important?

Children grow and develop at different rates and it's important to know when additional support and interventions may be necessary. Early Identification leads to early intervention, which improves student achievement. Children who receive early and appropriate support are less likely to experience persistent academic difficulties. Learn the Signs. Act Early. (LTSAE) is a federally mandated initiative to support tracking developmental milestones and acting early if there is a concern. The CDC outlines the following benefits of early intervention:

- Early intervention is likely to be more effective when it is provided earlier in life rather than later.
- Early intervention services can change a child's developmental path and improve outcomes for children, families, and communities.
- Families benefit from early intervention by being able to better meet their children's needs from an early age and throughout their lives.

The following steps are intended to provide a framework for developing an early identification system so that children are receiving the necessary support to achieve academic success in typical early childhood environments.

Step 1: Understand How Children Develop

Step 2: Encourage Development Through Daily Routines and Activities

Step 3: Establish a Developmental Screening, Intervention, and Referral Process

Step 4: Support Families in Children's Developmental Progress

## Step 1: Understand How Children Develop

There is a wide range of normally developing behaviors and skills in young children, known as developmental "milestones". These milestones serve as markers for when behaviors and skills typically emerge. While not all children will reach developmental milestones at the same time, it's important to understand the critical milestones that children are expected to achieve.

**Educators and Providers** embed training opportunities and resources that support the daily reference of developmental progression.

- The Louisiana's Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) are designed as a continuum to help early childhood educators look across age levels and learning domains to see how children's development emerges and progresses over time. The goal is to learn what developmental steps the child is taking now, and to meet the individual needs of that child on a daily basis. Educators should use the ELDS as a daily reference and resource.
- Learn the Signs. Act Early. provides materials from the CDC. to track child development.

**Families** learn more about their child's development at each stage of life.

- The LTSAE Milestones in Action provide a free library of pictures and videos of developmental milestones for children of all ages for families to reference.
- The ABCs of Development provide an easy-to-follow developmental map for families in the areas of physical development, interpersonal skills, thinking skills, and communication skills.

**Community Entities** work in partnership to ensure support is provided to the field.

- Lead Agencies and CCR&R's can support their communities by distributing flyers that support understanding developmental milestones.
- LDOE and LDH are collaborating to co-brand the suite of resources offered through Learn the Signs. Act Early. For more information regarding obtaining free co-branded materials, reach out to earlychildhood@la.gov.

## Step 2: Encourage Development Through Daily Routines and Activities

Healthy development is supported when children are exposed to opportunities and experiences where their physical, interpersonal and educational needs are met. When teachers and caregivers understand the expectations for development, as outlined in the Louisiana's Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS), they can use that information in planning for routines and activities. Developmental monitoring describes the ways in which practitioners can observe how children develop over time and whether a child meets the typical developmental milestones in a variety of domains including interpersonal, gross motor, fine motor, language, and cognition.

Promoting children's development requires intentional planning and consistent monitoring. When planning activities, consider practices that create opportunities to strengthen and develop supportive relationships. Quality programs take responsibility for providing high-quality

interactions and instruction to all children, including those whose development may be delayed, have an identified disability, or whose home language is not English. Staff members in these programs are committed to providing access to settings where children are educated and cared for alongside their typically developing peers.

**Educators and Providers** participate in consistent quality training on the subjects that matter the most for supporting child development.

**Educators and Providers** monitor children's development through Teaching Strategies GOLD® to identify learning and developmental lags and gaps in order to provide appropriate instruction and make decisions on whether or not a child may be in need of additional support.

- The Child Care Curriculum Initiative Guidance is intended to support programs in choosing curricula appropriate for children age birth to five. Through a rigorous evaluation process, the LDOE has identified and ranked curricula based criteria including alignment to the Birth to Five Standards, quality and complexity of learning activities, and potential for individualizing instruction. The LDOE strongly encourages the implementation of the highest tiered curriculum.
- Teaching Strategies Objectives for Development and Learning uses a color band system to show which skills and behaviors are typical for children of a particular age. The bands help manage the complexity and ongoing changes of young children's development.
- Louisiana's Early Childhood Key Training Modules are a set of accessible, high-quality trainings designed by experts on best practices in the field of early childhood. Early Childhood programs are encouraged to contact their local Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R) for course offerings.

**Families** continuously monitor children's development and take action when there is a concern.

- The LTSAE Milestone Checklists make developmental monitoring practical and easy for families to monitor children's development at every stage, and act early when there is a concern.

**Community Entities** work in partnership to ensure support is provided to the field.

- Lead Agencies and CCR&R's can support their communities by integrating the LTSAE Milestone Moment Booklets into early care and education centers during enrollment events and family engagement opportunities. Examples include:
  - sending home in backpacks;
  - sharing at open house events;
  - use during parent/teacher meetings; and
  - make available at family fun nights.

## Step 3: Establish a Developmental Screening, Intervention, and Referral Process

The ongoing development of our youngest population is critical for ensuring academic success and improving outcomes. Exposure to enriching learning experiences can have a positive influence on a child's developmental progress. Adversely, environmental factors including

traumatic events can have a negative impact; however, supportive relationships with caring and competent educators and providers can help mitigate the impacts of traumatic events.

## Why is developmental screening so critical?

Developmental disabilities and delays can often go undetected. Universal screening and surveillance of all children for early identification leads to long-term achievement. When supported by early childhood educators and professionals, as well as health care professionals, problems can be identified early and accurately and support a child's trajectory for success.

## Developmental Screening Background Information

Children grow and develop at different rates and it is important to know when additional support and interventions may be necessary. Early Identification leads to early intervention, which improves student achievement and reduces gaps in learning. Children who receive early and appropriate support are less likely to experience persistent academic difficulties.

The CDC outlines the following benefits of early intervention:

- Early intervention is likely to be more effective when it is provided earlier in life rather than later.
- Early intervention services can change a child's developmental path and improve outcomes for children, families, and communities.
- Families benefit from early intervention by being able to better meet their children's needs from an early age and throughout their lives.

How do developmental screenings differ from developmental monitoring?

- Developmental screening is a process to quickly identify a child's progress in meeting early childhood developmental milestones. The results of the screening do not confirm a developmental delay or allow for diagnosis, but may indicate a deviation from the expected norms of typical development. An observation based assessment, like Teaching Strategies GOLD ®, is an ongoing process to determine if a child or groups of children are meeting specified outcomes and goals, which is also known as developmental monitoring. Both a developmental screener and an observation based assessment can work together to ensure appropriate support and interventions are in place and all necessary stakeholders, including family members, are collaborating to better understand the needs of the child.

Developmental screenings can be used to help determine if a child's learning and development is on track based on important areas of development including language, motor, cognitive, and interpersonal domains. **Results from developmental screeners can inform children's strengths and identify specific areas where more support might be considered.**

A screening is typically conducted through a research-based questionnaire in collaboration with families and caregivers. Every child should be screened at the appropriate entry point using a

high-quality screener. Data from the screener should inform instruction and **identify the need for any potential referrals for evaluation.**

## Recommendations on Screening Tools

It's important for educators and program staff to reinforce appropriate developmental screenings at critical stages of development.

| | |
|---|---|
| Formative Assessment LDOE:<br>Required assessment for children in publicly funded Pre-k | Developmental Screener:<br>The implementation of developmental screening is not a mandate or requirement. However, the Louisiana Department of Education has been building out a comprehensive universal screening initiative, which includes a long term plan for implementation of screening for all children ages birth to five. |
| Teaching Strategies GOLD®/SmartTeach™ | Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3rd Edition (ASQ-3) |

All children in Louisiana should receive periodic, developmentally appropriate, and comprehensive screenings:

- as part of well-child visits to their pediatrician;
- in response to parental concerns; or
- in response to a triggering event such as hospitalization, trauma, or sudden onset of behavior that concerns;
- the family, caregiver, or teacher.

## Screening Best Practices

- A developmental screener should be completed by family members at key entry points and transitions. Educators and practitioners should use the information from the screener to determine if the family members have any developmental concerns or questions.
- Practitioners should input the information collected from the developmental screener as part of the comprehensive and ongoing observation data used for developmental monitoring.
- Practitioners are encouraged to conduct their own developmental screener and compare results to the information provided by families. Communicate observations regularly:
    - Are there specific areas where observations differ from information received by family members?
    - Are there areas of concern that the family members did not address, that the teacher or practitioner would like to discuss?
    - Are there specific areas where intentional strategies and supports that are needed to monitor progress in meeting appropriate developmental milestones and objectives?
    - Are there additional concerns and a need for additional screenings or evaluations?

- Screenings should be implemented on an ongoing basis and based on the following considerations: age intervals, ongoing conversations with families and observation based data within the classroom setting.

**Educators and Providers** receive training to implement a diagnostic screener at key entry and transition points.

- Screening tools, such as the Ages & Stages Questionnaires® are often used to detect delays in development. Comprehensive screenings provide important information to caregivers and families on children's developmental progress.
- The resources in Appendix A outline a spectrum of screenings and the periods in a young child's life in which they should occur.
- Appendix B outlines a screening and referral flow chart for early childhood programs to use as a reference for developing an early identification system.

**Families** collaborate with educators to complete diagnostic screeners periodically and inform practitioners and pediatricians when there are concerns.

- LTSAE How to Get Help for Your Child is a tip sheet to support families in developing a plan to address concerns regarding their child's development.

**Community Entities** work in partnership to ensure support is provided to the field.

- Lead Agencies and CCR&R's can reference LDH's Developmental Screening Resources and Tools for Providers in order to support families and providers in every region of the state to find resources in their communities.
- The Tulane Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation provides support services for Type III centers in areas such as:
    - child behavior;
    - teacher, director, and parent support;
    - classroom issues;
    - general stress and coping, and;
    - other concerns related to caring for young children.

## Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Child Find is a federal mandate included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that requires the identification, location and evaluation of all children with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. Child Find requirements include Part C (Early Intervention for infants and toddlers) and Part B (Early Childhood Special Education Services, ECSE, for children ages 3 through 5). Additional information regarding the transition from Part C to Part B services

can be found in Louisiana's Early Childhood Transition Process. A brief summary of information is below.

| EarlySteps (Part C) provides services to families with infants and toddlers **ages birth to three years (36 months)** who have a medical condition likely to result in a developmental delay, or who have developmental delays. | School Systems provide services to families with children **ages three to five (Part B)** and may be eligible to receive special education services. |
|---|---|
| • Children with delays in cognitive, motor, vision, hearing, communication, interpersonal skills, or adaptive development may be eligible for services. EarlySteps services are designed to improve the family's capacity to enhance their child's development. These services are provided in the child's natural environment, such as the child's home, child care, or any other community setting typical for children aged birth to 3 years (36 months).<br>• Family members and practitioners can contact Early Steps System Point of Entry (SPOE) to make referrals. | • A qualified team of professionals, along with family members, will make the determination. Through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), districts will receive a funding allocation based on the number of IDEA eligible children served.<br>• While interventions are not required for a preschool-aged child, a student suspected of being gifted or talented, or a student suspected of having a severe or low incidence impairment, Bulletin 1508 can support Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in understanding ChildFind and Pupil Appraisal services. |

The following recommendations are intended for programs to encourage healthy screening and effective transitions for children from Part C to Part B. Early Steps, Lead Agency networks and school systems should:

- prioritize attending monthly meetings;
- utilize coordinated enrollment events to conduct screenings and collect updates for immunizations;
- develop and implement workshops for health screenings where Part C and Part B staff can attend; and
- create and administer family outreach surveys to communicate the screening process and gauge the level of comfort.

## Step 4: Support Families in Children's Developmental Progress

Children's development is best supported when adults who care for them work as a team. It is important that lines of communication among all members of the team are open and on-going in order to share information on how a child is progressing, whether or not there are concerns, and how those concerns should be addressed.

**Educators and Providers** develop a communication system for ongoing communication with families and caregivers and address concerns in a collaborative approach.

- Appendix C outlines strategies for communicating children's developmental progress with families.
- Appendix D outlines strategies for communicating concerns about a child's development with families.

**Families** know their rights to ensure what is best for their child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

- Families can reference the Early Childhood Transition Process as a guide to prepare for smooth and effective transitions for children who have been identified with a disability.
- How to Talk With the Doctor supports the development of questions and information that families may want to share with a pediatrician.

**Community Entities** work in partnership to ensure support is provided to the field.

- Lead Agencies and CCR&R's reference the Community Outreach Specialists directory to support early childhood program staff and families with their statewide parent consultant/COS coordinator.

## Framework for Screening Implementation

The following framework supports achieving ambitious goals for children with disabilities by ensuring they are identified as early and as accurately as possible.

| Elements of Identification | Key Actions | Resources |
|---|---|---|
| Coordinate Early and Accurate Identification | • Enact a comprehensive screening and intervention plan.<br>• Educate staff on the administration of screening assessments and how to use them effectively.<br>• Choose and administer a screening assessment to every child upon entry into the program.<br>• Collect and complete ongoing formative assessment data for every child.<br>• Develop a sub-committee that consists of key stakeholders from various entities to support screening process | Developmental Screening Guidebook<br><br>Developmental Screening Toolkit<br><br>PK - 3rd Grade Assessment Guidance |
| Communicate with Families | • Host events to educate families and disseminate information on developmental milestones and the screening process.<br>• Provide families with referral, screening and evaluation information.<br>• Schedule regular meetings with families to share results and identify next steps.<br>• Provide education practitioners with ongoing training | Learn the Signs. Act Early<br><br>Developmental Screening Guidebook<br><br>Early Childhood Transition Process |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | and support on engaging families and building trusting relationships through the screening process. | |
| Communicate and Collaborate with Partners | • Work with community agencies to train staff on screening and referral processes.<br>• Join Early Steps transition meetings to discuss screening, evaluation and next steps.<br>• Provide referral, screening and evaluation information to area pediatricians, early childhood medical professionals and community agencies such as homeless shelters.<br>• Connect with universities and other agencies to identify trained personnel for the pupil appraisal team.<br>• Work collaboratively with the pupil appraisal team to identify effective assessments. | Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies<br><br>Early Childhood Transition Process |

## Developmental Screening Framework Self-Assessment

The following self-assessment should be completed at the beginning, middle and end of the planning process to support a comprehensive approach to developmental screening.

| Developmental Screening Framework Self Assessment | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Coordination** | **Not Yet** | **In Process** | **In Place** | **Notes** |
| Develop a sub-committee that consists of key stakeholders from various entities to support the screening process. (Child Find, Early Steps, family members, community stakeholders, SBLC and Pupil Appraisal, etc.) | | | | |
| Create and develop a written screening process that supports a network wide implementation of an approved screener. | | | | |
| Develop and communicate screening best practices and importance of screening to community and families. | | | | |
| Learn from families to determine the best ways to engage in screening and monitoring development (consider enrollment events, community screening clinics, virtual screening options, etc.). | | | | |
| Develop strategies to support implementation in anticipation of potential challenges and questions. | | | | |
| **Implementation** | **Not Yet** | **In Process** | **In Place** | **Notes** |
| Design a training plan for implementation and create guidance for various types of training (in person and virtual), onboarding, and consistency of experience with screening tools. | | | | |
| Provide family engagement events throughout the year. Families should have multiple opportunities, at various times and locations, to learn about the importance of developmental milestones, monitoring, screening, interventions, etc. Ensure that this information is available on your network's March 2021 website. | | | | |
| Ensure there is a comprehensive referral process that includes specific procedures, defined roles, and responsibilities. | | | | |
| Collect and analyze screening data, in conjunction with formative assessment data (TS GOLD). | | | | |
| Evaluate these procedures and processes for improvement through collaboration with sub-committee, e.g. family surveys and internal surveys. | | | | |

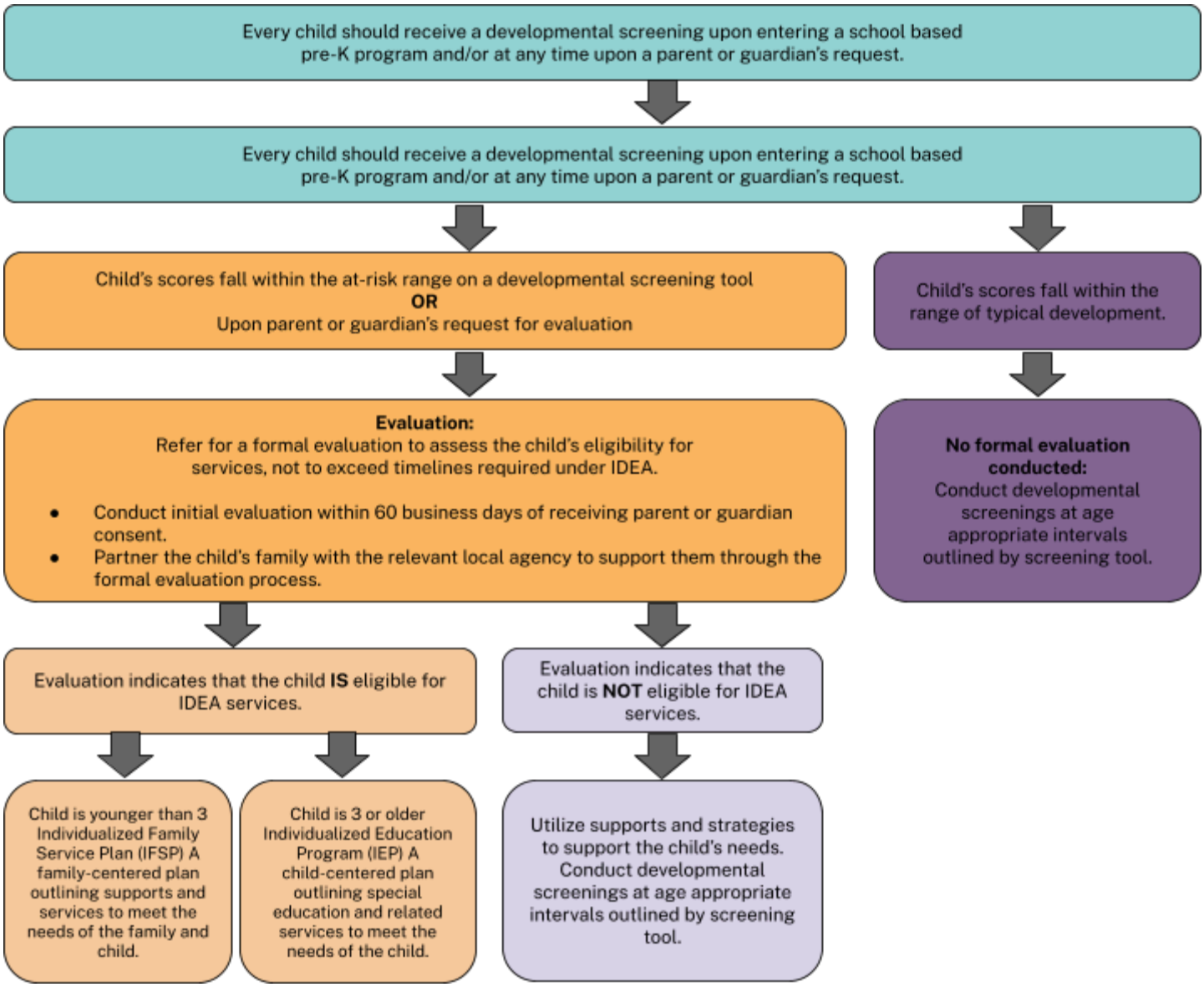
## Appendix A: Screening Guidelines

The Louisiana Developmental Screening Guidelines (LDSG) expand screening beyond general development, autism, and caregiver well-being. These voluntary guidelines promote national best practices and support providers with resources to build comprehensive screening services at the practice level.

The Recommendations for Preventative Pediatric Health Care represent a consensus by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Bright Futures and are designed for the care of children who are receiving competent parenting, have no manifestations of any important health problems, and are growing and developing in a satisfactory fashion. The recommendations in this statement do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or serve as a standard of medical care. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate.

## Appendix B: Screening and Referral Flow Chart for Early Childhood Programs

According to Title 28, Part CI. Bulletin 1508 - Pupil Appraisal Handbook, "interventions are not required for a preschool-aged child."



## Appendix C: Communicating Children's Developmental Progress with Families

Programs should develop strategies for communicating children's developmental progress with families or caregivers on a routine basis.

- Develop opportunities for ongoing discussions about children's development and developmental milestones. Consider including pertinent information in the programs Handbook or Guide.
- Develop a schedule of ongoing opportunities to share individual children's developmental progress (i.e. parent/ teacher conferences and family nights).
- Routinely share activities that can support children's learning and development (i.e. sending home family engagement activities from Teaching Strategies GOLD® that are specific to child's developmental progress).
- Encourage families to work with pediatricians or other health providers to administer screenings and communicate with programs.
- Routinely celebrate with families when a child meets important milestones which will help them become more aware of how their child is progressing and encourage them to share what they are seeing at home with the program staff.

## Appendix D: Communicating Concerns with Families

Programs should develop strategies for communicating concerns about a child's development.

- Choose a time and place where you can talk with families without being interrupted and ensure ample time is available for conversations and questions from the family.
- Work with staff to ensure adequate evidence and documentation is available to share.
- Start with positives - share what the child is doing well and what accomplishments he/she has achieved.
- Be prepared for strong emotions since families may or may not sense there is a problem. ›
- Share concerns based on objective evidence or documentation that has been collected during the daily routines and activities of the program; share concerns based on the developmental milestones of what is expected for a child of that age.
- Pose thoughtful questions to families to share observations at home related to the evidence and documentation provided. Be mindful of observations that may differ from documentation being provided. Consider ways to facilitate a productive conversation to identify next steps that the family feels comfortable with.
- Take the time to share resources and support and the process for additional screening and making referrals.

- Remind the family that their concerns are not based on a diagnosis or evaluation and that they may want to schedule an appointment with their pediatrician or family physician for further screening.