

The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF): Ages Birth to Five is designed to represent the continuum of learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The framework is grounded in a comprehensive body of research about what young children should know and be able to do to succeed in school. The framework is intended to assist programs in their efforts to deliver high-quality early care and learning experiences and to guide programs in aligning their assessments, curricula, and professional development to school readiness goals. The organization of the framework starts with five broad domains (areas of learning and development) that are essential for school readiness and success, including: Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Language and Literacy; Cognition; and Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development. Under each domain, components of development within a domain are organized by sub-domains; under sub-domains, broad statements of expectations for children's learning and development are articulated as goals.

Many Head Start programs use the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program to screen, assess, and strengthen young children's social and emotional health. The core of the program is the DECA, a nationally standardized, strength-based, reliable, and valid behavior rating scale that parents and teachers can use to understand the social and emotional strengths and needs of young children. An assessment for infants (1-18 months old), toddlers (18-36 months old), and preschoolers (3-5 years old) allows parents and teachers to reflect on how often a child engages in behaviors related to social and emotional development and resilience. The behaviors are organized into three areas, including:

- ❖ **Attachment/Relationships:** The child's ability to promote and maintain mutual, positive connections with other children and significant adults
- ❖ **Self-Regulation:** The child's ability to express emotions and manage behaviors in healthy ways
- ❖ **Initiative:** The child's ability to use independent thought and action to meet his or her needs

These areas are well documented in the literature and include behaviors and skills that young children need for healthy social and emotional development. Research-based strategies are provided so that assessment results lead to an informed planning process that addresses areas of need.

This document was last updated in June of 2024.

To learn more about the DECA Program for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers, please visit www.centerforresilientchildren.org.

The DECA Program and two of the HSELOF Domains (Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development) strongly align. This document is intended to illustrate that alignment by presenting each Domain, Sub-Domain and Goals, followed by a statement that articulates the connection between that information and the three areas of Attachment/Relationships, Self-Regulation, and Initiative. The Devereux Center for Resilient Children refers to this process as “wearing social and emotional lenses,” which helps to look at goals underneath each Domain and understand how they are connected to promoting a child’s healthy Attachment/Relationships, Self-Regulation, and Initiative. These statements are followed by selected items from the DECA tool that closely align to the outlined goals. **Use the hyperlinks below to navigate this document.**

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Age: Infant/Toddler

Domain: Social and Emotional Development

Sub-Domain: Relationships with Adults

IT-SE 1. Child develops expectations of consistent, positive interactions through secure relationships with familiar adults.

IT-SE 2. Child uses expectations learned through repeated experiences in primary relationships to develop relationships with other adults.

IT-SE 3. Child learns to use adults as a resource to meet needs.

INITIATIVE: Children who feel safe and securely attached to a familiar adult can engage in exploring their environment and learn new things.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: When children have reliable and trusting attachments to familiar adults, they look to those adults to meet their needs and are eventually then able to develop positive relationships with other adults.

SELF-REGULATION: Children learn to express emotions when they have a secure relationship with familiar adults and can look to that adult to help them regulate their strong emotions.

Consider the following examples from the DECA Infant/Toddler: *Smile at familiar adults; Reach for a familiar adult; Express a variety of emotions.*

Sub-Domain: Relationships with Other Children

IT-SE 4. Child shows interest in, interacts with, and develops personal relationships with other children.

IT-SE 5. Child imitates and engages in play with other children.

INITIATIVE: Providing opportunities for watching and exploring enables children to begin to initiate play and interactions with others.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children can begin to play and build relationships with other children when they have plentiful opportunities for watching, exploring, and imitating others.

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SELF-REGULATION: In playing with others, such as rolling a ball back and forth, children begin to learn patience and turn-taking which supports the development of self-regulation.

Consider the following examples from the DECA Infant/Toddler: *Enjoy being around other children; Play with other children.*

Sub-Domain: Emotional Functioning

IT-SE 6. Child learns to express a range of emotions.

IT-SE 7. Child recognizes and interprets emotions of others with the support of familiar adults.

IT-SE 8. Child expresses care and concern towards others.

IT-SE 9. Child manages emotions with the support of familiar adults.

INITIATIVE: Emotions help to guide children as they learn how to persist at an activity or end it when they may need a break.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Labeling feelings and emotions helps children to understand the perspective of others and begin to develop empathy.

SELF-REGULATION: Understanding the feelings and emotions of self and others helps children manage their emotions and adjust their behavior in different situations.

Consider the following examples from the DECA Infant/Toddler: *Express a variety of emotions; Accept comfort from a familiar adult; Try to comfort others.*

Sub-Domain: Sense of Identity and Belonging

IT-SE 10. Child shows awareness about self and how to connect with others.

IT-SE 11. Child understands some characteristics of self and others.

IT-SE 12. Child shows confidence in own abilities through relationships with others.

IT-SE 13. Child develops a sense of belonging through relationships with others.

INITIATIVE: Children who feel confident about their own abilities and feel a sense of belonging are more likely to actively explore their environments, try new things and learn.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: As children grow to become more aware of self and begin to experience a sense of belonging, they can form trusting and enjoyable relationships with adult caregivers and other children.

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SELF-REGULATION: When children feel a sense of belonging and are beginning to feel confident in their abilities, they are more likely to respond willingly and positively to the guidance and re-direction of caregivers, which is then supporting their emerging ability to self-regulate.

Consider the following examples from the DECA Infant/Toddler: *Express her/his dislikes; Show preference for a particular playmate.*

Domain: Approaches to Learning

Sub-Domain: Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation

IT-ATL 1. Child manages feelings and emotions with support of familiar adults.

IT-ATL 2. Child manages actions and behavior with support of familiar adults.

INITIATIVE: When children can begin to manage their feelings, emotions, actions, and behaviors, they are able to engage in play and actively explore their environment.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children who are beginning to manage their feelings, emotions and behaviors experience more positive interactions and build stronger, more trusting relationships with other children and their adult caregivers.

SELF-REGULATION: With the support of familiar, trusting caregivers, children are beginning to manage their feelings, emotions and behaviors which support their growing self-regulation skills.

Consider the following examples from the DECA Infant/Toddler: *Make others aware of her/his needs; Handle frustration well; Seek comfort from familiar adult.*

Sub-Domain: Cognitive Self-Regulation

IT-ATL 3. Child maintains focus and sustains attention with support.

IT-ATL 4. Child develops the ability to show persistence in actions and behavior.

IT-ATL 5. Child demonstrates the ability to be flexible in actions and behavior.

INITIATIVE: When children begin to maintain focus and attention, show persistence and flexibility, they are more likely to continue trying and complete tasks that may be challenging.

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ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children who experience trusting and safe relationships with their caregivers are better able to maintain focus and attention, persist when faced with a challenge and be flexible in their actions.

SELF-REGULATION: With the support and guidance of caregivers in play, children are learning to focus and to practice flexibility. These skills support the development of self-regulation.

Consider the following examples from the DECA Infant/Toddler: *Keep trying when unsuccessful; Accept another choice when first choice is not available; Easily go from one activity to another.*

Sub-Domain: Initiative and Curiosity

IT-ATL 6. Child demonstrates emerging initiative in interactions, experiences, and explorations.

IT-ATL 7. Child shows interest in and curiosity about objects, materials, or events.

INITIATIVE: Children who are curious and interested in experiences, materials and events are more able to take action to try new things and learn new things from those experiences.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children who have safe and trusting relationships with adults are more likely to freely explore their environments and initiate experiences that nurture their curiosity about how the world works.

SELF-REGULATION: Children learn to self-regulate in the context of exploring objects and their environments with a supportive adult close by to encourage and re-direct as needed.

Consider the following examples from the DECA Infant/Toddler: *Try to do new things; Show interest in her/his surroundings; Enjoy interacting with others.*

Sub-Domain: Creativity

IT-ATL 8. Child uses creativity to increase understanding and learning.

IT-ATL 9. Child shows imagination in play and interactions with others.

INITIATIVE: Children are practicing their ability to try new ideas; problem solving and experiment when they are using their imaginations in interactions and play with others.

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ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children who feel safe in trusting relationships with their caregivers and are supported and encouraged by their caregivers, can learn to use their imagination in play.

SELF-REGULATION: Children are learning to self-regulate in imaginative play when adults are nearby to support and guide them in their play.

Consider the following example from the DECA Infant/Toddler: *Play make-believe.*

Age: Preschool

Domain: Social and Emotional Development

Sub-Domain: Relationships with Adults

P-SE 1. Child engages in and maintains positive relationships and interactions with adults.

P-SE 2. Child engages in prosocial and cooperative behavior with adults.

INITIATIVE: The act of building and maintaining positive relationships with adults presents children with opportunities to take risks and learn something new.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children build trust when they experience caring, responsive, and helpful people in the world. The capacity for attachment/relationships helps to develop working models for all other relationships.

SELF-REGULATION: Children do not naturally acquire self-regulation. They need caring adults to patiently teach these skills and many opportunities to practice them. When adults are respectful and nurturing, children can learn the skills necessary to engage positively with others.

Consider the following example from the DECA Preschool: *Ask adults to play with or read to him/her; Show affection for familiar adults.*

Sub-Domain: Relationships with Other Children

P-SE 3. Child engages in and maintains positive interactions and relationships with other children.

P-SE 4. Child engages in cooperative play other children.

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P-SE 5. Child uses basic problem-solving skills to resolve conflicts with others.

INITIATIVE: Children have fun and gain a sense of belonging when they play and work together. When provided with opportunities, children enjoy doing things they could not do alone and work together to achieve a common goal.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children are learning an important and sometimes difficult task – balancing their own needs with those of others. They need lots of practice to learn how to negotiate, cooperate and get along with others. When children use behavior that is safe and respectful of others, it helps them to build relationships.

SELF-REGULATION: Children vary in their ability to use self-regulation. When children can practice how to navigate social situations, they can better anticipate and deal with challenges.

Consider the following example from the DECA Preschool: *Cooperate with others; play well with others.*

Sub-Domain: Emotional Functioning

P-SE 6. Child expresses a broad range of emotions and recognizes these emotions in self and others.

P-SE 7. Child expresses care and concern toward others.

P-SE 8. Child manages emotions with increasing independence.

INITIATIVE: Children gain comfort when the adults that surround them provide them with a safe place to explore and express a variety of emotions. When young children learn to label how they feel, they can communicate more clearly and get their emotional needs met.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Learning to recognize and name feelings and emotions helps children develop trust and learn to play well with others. Skills related to empathy also begin to develop as children (at the most basic level) can begin to think about how another person is feeling.

SELF-REGULATION: After developing the ability to express and identify their emotions, children are then able to begin recognizing these feelings in others, making them more successful in peer situations as they begin to develop empathy and conflict management skills.

Consider the following example from the DECA Preschool: *Calm himself/herself down; handle frustration well.*

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Sub-Domain: Sense of Identity and Belonging

P-SE 9. Child recognizes self as a unique individual having own abilities, characteristics, emotions, and interests.

P-SE 10. Child expresses confidence in own skills and positive feelings about self.

P-SE 11. Child has sense of belonging to family, community, and other groups.

INITIATIVE: When adults help children recognize that they each have unique skills and that their individual efforts can lead to positive outcomes, children may be more likely to take more explore and try new things.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: A child's sense of identity is developed not only by his/her own perceptions and expectations, but also by the perceptions and expectations of significant people in their life. Adults who communicate to children that they have strengths, that they are valued, and that they are important members of the classroom community are providing the foundation for the development of healthy relationships.

SELF-REGULATION: Children should be provided with opportunities to demonstrate their emerging abilities. When children are given expectations, guidelines, and opportunities they can learn to reflect, reason, problem-solve and consider the consequences of the actions they may choose.

Consider the following example from the DECA Preschool: *Look forward to activities at home or school; Show confidence in his/her ability.*

Domain: Approaches to Learning

Sub-Domain: Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation

P-ATL 1. Child manages emotions with increasing independence.

P-ATL 2. Child follows classroom rules and routines with increasing independence.

P-ATL 3. Child appropriately handles and takes care of classroom materials.

P-ATL 4. Child manages actions, words, and behaviors with increasing independence.

INITIATIVE: Children are active constructors of their own understanding of the world around them. They benefit from initiating and regulating their own learning activities and from interacting with peers.

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ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: When children actively participate in the care of the classroom, they feel more like a part of the classroom community. As a connection to the classroom grows, children tend to display less disruptive behaviors and are more likely to develop healthy relationships with peers and adults.

SELF-REGULATION: Teachers of young children play a vital role in helping children develop foundational self-regulation skills. Fortunately, young children's everyday experiences offer abundant opportunities for developing self-regulation. As teachers work with intention, children can develop meaningful self-regulatory skills while learning to care for the classroom environment.

Consider the following example from the DECA Preschool: *Listen to or respect others; handle frustration well.*

Sub-Domain: Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)

P-ATL 5. Child demonstrates an increasing ability to control impulses.

P-ATL 6. Child maintains focus and sustains attention with minimal adult support.

P-ATL 7. Child persists in tasks.

P-ATL 8. Child holds information in mind and manipulates it to perform tasks.

P-ATL 9. Child demonstrates flexibility in thinking and behavior.

INITIATIVE: Teachers can increase the likelihood that children will be engaged in meaningful ways if the materials and activities provided are designed and selected based on the children's unique interests, ability levels, and background.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children are born with the potential to develop skills related to self-regulation and executive functioning. Adults can facilitate the development of a child's executive function skills by establishing routines, modeling social behavior, and creating and maintaining supportive, reliable relationships.

SELF-REGULATION: Children's executive function and self-regulation skills grow at a fast pace during preschool, so it is important to adapt activities to match the skills of each child. Children are more likely to learn and to demonstrate appropriate behaviors when they are in a classroom where they are engaged and active.

Consider the following example from the DECA Preschool: *Remember important information; accept another choice when his/her first is not available.*

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Sub-Domain: Initiative and Curiosity

P-ATL 10. Child demonstrates initiative and independence.

P-ATL 11. Child shows interest in and curiosity about the world around them.

P-ATL 12. Child expresses creativity in thinking and communication.

INITIATIVE: During the preschool years, children demonstrate initiative by asking questions, making, and carrying out plans, exploring, experimenting, using creativity, and problem-solving. By getting to know a child individually, teachers can discover insight into each child's creativity, use of pretend play, and eagerness for more complex challenges.

ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS: Children need to feel secure before they can do anything else, including exploring new and interesting things around them. Over time, with a teacher who the child can trust and depend on, children can come to view the teacher as a secure base for exploration.

SELF-REGULATION: With guidance and discipline, children can learn to be creative and to explore new and interesting things. Having adults close by during creative and dramatic play experiences helps children know that an adult is there to acknowledge, appreciate, and redirect as necessary.

Consider the following example from the DECA Preschool: *Try different ways to solve a problem; show an interest in learning new things.*