

GUIDING LIGHT

THE UPDATED EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PROVIDES A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON CREATING CHILD-CENTRED LEARNING EXPERIENCES.

The Early Years Development Framework: A Good Start for Every Child (EYDF) was updated in 2023 to take into account recent advances in early years research and practice. The framework provides a guide for early childhood (EC) educators working with children from birth to three years in centre-based childcare settings. Research shows when parents and educators adapt or modify their behaviours in response to a child's cues and interests, and engage the child in quality interactions, this positively impacts brain development.

"Respectful, responsive and reciprocal (known as the '3Rs') interactions build positive relationships with young children. These have far-reaching implications for the babies' overall development and well-being," says Dr Melinda Eng, the EC consultant for the updated EYDF.



Care routines like mealtimes offer opportunities for learning and development

Although the framework is intended for infant and early years educators in centre-based childcare settings, it can also offer parents insights on how to be active participants in their children's learning journey at home, adds Dr Eng. "It helps parents make informed decisions, set realistic expectations, and respond

appropriately to their children's needs at different stages of development. Parents will then be able to discuss their children's progress more effectively with educators, engage in quality conversations with their children, and plan activities to enhance learning experiences at home," she says.



Point out and talk about play objects with children for them to explore

C.H.I.L.D. FIRST

The updated EYDF continues to emphasise the notion of children as joyful, curious, active and competent learners.

Dr Eng elaborates, "If educators adopt a deficit-based approach (i.e., children are viewed as having limited abilities to think, decide and learn), they tend to focus on the children's weaknesses and challenges. On the other hand, if educators believe infants and toddlers are competent learners and thinkers, they will plan experiences based on the children's strengths and interests, and create opportunities to empower them and optimise their potential."

This child-centric approach is encapsulated in the following five C.H.I.L.D. principles that offer practical strategies for bringing out the best in infants and toddlers, as well as the professional best in infant and early years educators.

Caregiving and Routines

"Caregiving is more than just meeting children's physical needs. It meets higher-order needs, like a sense of belonging or connection, and offers a meaningful context for learning and development to happen," notes Ms Cynthia Tan, a Curriculum Specialist at NTUC First Campus and a member of the EYDF Review Committee.

Remember to smile, make eye contact, and chat about the surroundings with babies during routines such as diapering, bedtime and mealtime. These actions support little ones in their communication skills, social-emotional development,

and cognitive skills such as sequencing and cause-and-effect which are also pre-numeracy skills. For instance, during care routines, describe each step (e.g., "We're going to take off your shirt first. Then we're going to put on a fresh diaper."). Everyday interactions, including games such as peek-a-boo or hide-and-seek, also build their working memory and attention span.

Holistic Development

Provide varied learning experiences that address all four areas of development. For instance, educators can incorporate more outdoor exploration into the curriculum, on top of encouraging imaginative play by leveraging items found in the surrounding environment and role-playing.

"Educators can bring leaves, stones and insects into the classroom for infants and toddlers to observe and learn about the natural world," says Ms Lotus Lai, Cluster Principal of Agape Little Uni., who also sat on the EYDF Review Committee.

Intentional Planning

Activities that cater to children's interests and abilities stimulate their curiosity and motivate them to explore and discover the world around them. Parents and educators can share information and discuss their observations of how children play and behave to have a better understanding of the children's development and to provide appropriate play materials.

Think about what questions to ask children. While questions like



Observe infants' gestures during activities like bubble play to see if they enjoy it



Interacting with the natural world spurs holistic development

"What is this colour?" or "How many are there?" are important, open-ended ones such as "I wonder why...?" or "What if daddy adds another block...?" can facilitate thinking and extend play.

Learning through Exploration and Play

"Provide a wide variety of tools and opportunities for children to practise and acquire skills," says Ms Lai. "Crayons and building blocks support fine motor skills, while balls and bean bags help toddlers build gross motor skills." Surround children with objects that appeal to their senses, such as those with textured surfaces and in different sizes; plastic bottles containing materials like beads, sand and pebbles that produce different sounds; and scented playdough.

Developing Secure Attachments

Children who form secure attachments with adults are better at regulating their emotions, engaging in social interactions, and coping with stress. It starts with building positive relationships, says Dr Eng, who urges educators and parents to adopt the 3Rs when interacting with young ones.

NTUC First Campus employs a primary caregiver system where every child has a key educator responsible for his or her development. Smaller group sizes also enable educators to nurture more intimate connections with each child. "With infants and toddlers, it's really about prioritising your relationship with them, not what lessons you are going to teach them," says Ms Tan.

KEY CHANGES IN EYDF 2023

➔ Greater alignment between EYDF and Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework (for educators of children aged 4 to 6) in terms of:

- Beliefs about children
- Importance of warm and responsive interactions
- Benefits of active engagement with families and the community
- Role of educators as thoughtful planners, responsive facilitators, reflective practitioners and collaborative partners

➔ Emphasis on 4 areas of development (cognitive, communication & language, physical, social & emotional), with developmental goals within each area

➔ Introduction of 5 new guiding principles (C.H.I.L.D.) to guide educators in their planning, processes and interactions with children

