

ACTIVITY PLANS

An activity plan is the heart of your environment. It enables families and other professionals to know exactly what is happening in the environment while also helping children understand what to expect. Plans should include activities that children find interesting and challenging. The length of your plan can vary based on the ages of children, the type of plan and the purpose behind the activities/materials provided. An activity plan should include the name of the group and teacher, estimated timeframe and specific activities and experiences provided. Activity plans are a working document and can be modified at any time.



When developing your activity plan, consider these questions:

- How do I make it meaningful to children?
- Does it match the ability levels of the children?
- Are the activities relevant and respectful to the children and their families?
- Do my planned activities support and align to the learning standards (ELDS/K-12)?
- What is my role and how do I do it?

★ On page 22 you will find a “check-in” to help you reflect on the activities and materials you have planned.

Creating a Meaningful Activity Plan

Building relationships through interactions and conversations with individual children provides opportunities for early childhood professionals to develop strong understanding of what is meaningful to each child. As you create your activity plan, consider incorporating the following: determining the children's interests, identifying their stage of development, implementing intentional teaching practices and reflecting on goals. Also, ensure that your plan is inclusive and respectful of children and family social and culture backgrounds.

Determining Children's Interests

Finding ways to understand the interests of children can be done in several ways: seeking feedback from families, listening to children's conversations and observing their play. Most importantly, it is done through adult-child interactions. The more you engage with children, the more you will learn about them and the easier activity planning becomes.



Identifying a Child's Stage of Development

Children learn at their own pace and in many different ways. It is the job of the professional to identify where they are developmentally and then meet them at their level. This means you may need to plan activities that are sometimes below or above their age group. This is called Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). For example, children getting ready to transition to the preschool setting may need more challenging activities so they do not become disengaged.

Intentional Teaching

Have you ever planned an activity and wondered why? Why teach this and are the children interested? Do they have the skill level? Is this something appropriate for this age? For example, a planned activity of playdough with scissors can be intentionally designed for the child who loves playing with playdough and needs more support or practice with scissors. Intentional activities are planned with purpose for desired outcomes and are linked to a child's individual goal. Intentional teachers use their knowledge and expertise to organize learning experiences for children.



Connecting Activity Plans With Learning and Development Standards

Teaching is an art form. Teachers use curriculum, philosophy and experience as tools to help plan for children's learning. Additionally, the learning and development standards are a guide for age-appropriate learning experiences. Activity planning should link your beliefs and practices in how children learn with the learning and development standards.

State Standards

- The State of Ohio has created age-appropriate learning and development standards for teachers to use when activity planning for children.
 - *Birth-5 years*: Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards
 - *Kindergarten to age 12*: K-12 Standards Resource Guide
- These standards are resources professionals use to identify age-appropriate goals for children's development and learning. They help guide the activity planning process and implementation of curriculum and child assessment.

Reflecting On and Setting Goals

Goals are created by reflecting on child observations, work samples, assessments and gathering family input. Teachers support goals through engagement and activities documented on the activity plan to develop specific skills. For example, a school-age teacher notices a child struggling with being able to calm down. The teacher introduces breathing and calming activities to strengthen social-emotional skills. Additionally, best practice encourages teachers to share and discuss goals with families during conference time.

Backmapping and scaffolding are common techniques educators use during the activity planning process. These practices are beneficial when determining how to individualize for each child and help them achieve goals.

- Backmapping is a technique where professionals start with an activity that they know the children find interesting, then begin to determine what standards may be connected to the activity.
- Scaffolding occurs when the educator observes that a child may need more support with a certain skill or concept. This can be done through intentional teacher-child interactions and/or through strategically planned activities that gradually support their development. For example, providing children with opportunities to use scissors with playdough allows them to practice the motion and develop muscle strength.

★ *For more information about learning standards please see the Learning and Development Standards section beginning on page 23.*

Role of the Professional Educator

The role of the educator is the most important part of the activity planning process. The professional's ability to engage, observe, be flexible and reflective will help all children be successful. Encouraging family and community involvement in your planning process helps create a strong sense of partnership.

Be Reflective

Being reflective of your practices allows you to see what is working and what needs to be changed. Some activities you plan may need to be modified, changed completely or extended. Activities may also need to be repeated based on the interest, skill levels and previous life experiences of the children. A reflective educator knows the importance of following the child's lead during the activity planning process.

Be Flexible

Your activity plan is a working document not bound by time and can be shortened or extended based on the interest levels of the children. When professionals are flexible, they can take action to change materials, repeat activities when needed to maintain interest and follow the children's lead. By modifying or extending activities, children continue to learn and explore new possibilities while strengthening their development.

Teacher Interactions and Open-ended Questions

To fully engage children in learning it is best to be at their eye level. This often means sitting on the floor playing with blocks or at a child's table engaging in conversation. As teachers interact with children, asking open-ended questions is a strategy that is used to scaffold a child's learning and development and promote problem-solving skills.



★ Examples of teacher-interactions and open-ended questions can be found in the Best Practice section of this guide beginning on page 43.

What Works Best for Small and Large Groups

Determining the group size to use for an activity is an important decision to make. Small and large groups offer possibilities to engage children while learning different skills and some activities may be better suited for one group type over another. Additionally, family child care programs may find they utilize more small group activities and strategies while center-based programs may have more opportunities to involve larger group sizes. In the end, it is up to you to determine which group size is best suited for your planned activities and environment.

Small Groups = Deeper Learning

Small groups allow for one-on-one teacher-child interactions. They help teachers observe children and establish goals while continuing to facilitate children's individual learning.

Some skills developed during these times include:

- Social emotional skills like turn-taking, communicating needs and problem solving
- Independent, self-directed learning
- Fine motor skills
- Letters, counting, shapes, sorting, etc.



Large Group = Broader Learning

Large groups give children the opportunity to practice working together with peers.

Some skills developed during these times include:

- Social emotional skills like building cooperation, strengthening peer relationships, learning from peers
- Awareness of personal space
- Language and communication
- Gross motor movement
- Transitions and establishing routines



The Planning Cycle

Using a consistent method when planning will help you be more accurate and intentional when focusing on the whole child. The Planning Cycle consists of four parts: Observe & Assess, Plan, Implement and Evaluate & Reflect. In the graphic on the next page, we have included questions in each part to help guide you through the cycle.



Observe & Assess

It is important to understand where each child is developmentally because individual children, regardless of age, develop at their own pace. This understanding is achieved through active observation.



Plan

Planning is the process of identifying and creating activities that support children in the learning environment.



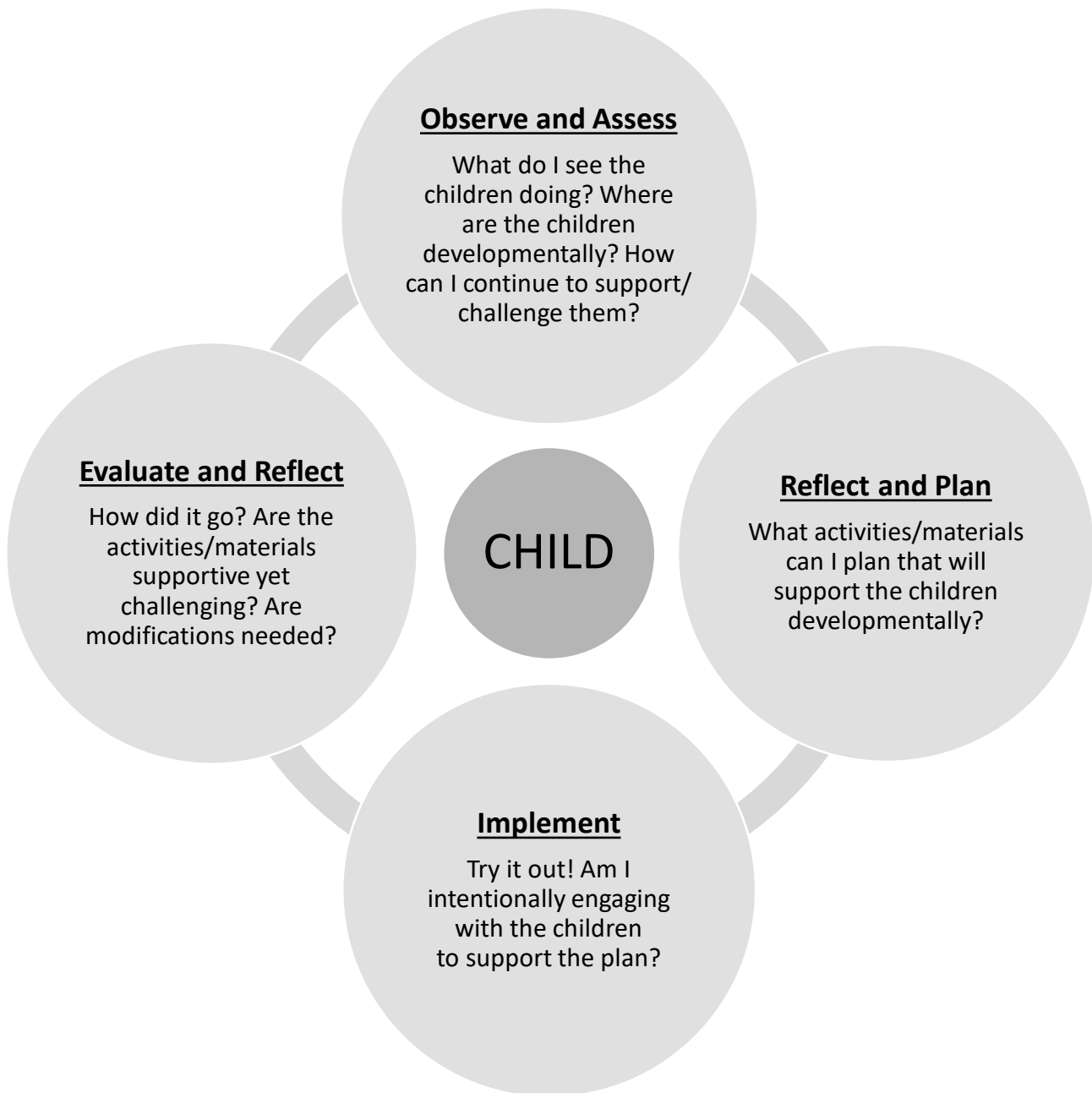
Implement

Implementation is the process of supporting children while they are actively engaged in play. This is done by sitting with children and asking open-ended questions, modeling use of materials and building meaningful relationships.



Evaluate and Reflect

The process of evaluating and reflecting helps identify if the materials and activities you planned are meeting the needs of all children. This helps you understand if modifications are needed.



Activities/Materials Check-in

Once you have completed your Activity Plan, conduct a check-in to make sure you have covered the best practice topics outlined below.

Questions	Material/Area Examples	Teacher Notes (Changes to make)
Will the children find these activities meaningful and interesting, as well as related to previous life experiences?		
Are these activities developmentally appropriate and open-ended?		
Do these activities support individual needs and goals for children?		
Do these activities support the standards for my group of children (ELDS or K-12)?		
Is my plan flexible to meet the needs of the children?		
Do the materials in my environment reflect what is on my activity plan?		
Have I considered multi-cultural diversity, gender, and abilities?		
Is my plan detailed enough for others to follow in my absence?		
Have I made the appropriate modifications to maintain children's interest?		
Whenever possible am I promoting family involvement?		