Six Developmental Domains

Research shows that it is during the first three years of life that the brain undergoes its most dramatic development. It is in these earliest years that children are growing and developing in many different ways—socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. It is also the time that children are acquiring language and literacy skills and learning about cultural and social expectations. This is why it is important for child care providers to offer a well balanced program of developmentally appropriate activities which addresses the six areas of development: physical, language/literacy, social, cognitive, emotional, and cultural.

Physical Development is to do with movement: gross, or large, movement of limbs and fine manipulative movement of fingers. Physical development depends on growth of the body and nervous system so that messages from the brain can be carried to the muscles to stimulate them to move. Outdoor play provides fresh air for oxygen, sunlight for well being and vitamin D and space to run freely. Physical development stimulates children's curiosity and enables them to explore their environment. Adults need to provide a safe environment and safe objects to explore.

Language development is the process by which children come to understand and communicate language by expressing thoughts and feeling. Adults help children learn language primarily by talking with them.

Social Development is the ability to socially interact in an effective, responsive and appropriate way. This starts even before a child learns to speak. Helping children develop social skills is an extremely important activity for teachers and parents. Interactive games that are done just for fun, like patty-cake or peek-a-boo, help develop social skills that require an understanding of taking turns during an activity.

Cognitive Development is the child’s ability to learn and solve problems. For example, this includes a two-month-old baby learning to explore the environment with hands or eyes or a five-year-old learning how to do simple math problems.

Emotional Development is the ability to express feelings, control emotions, form relationships and develop feelings towards other people, and develop a self image and identity. Children need a caring consistent environment where each child feels secure and valued. A positive self image is promoted as adults celebrate achievements, talents and the individual qualities of the children.

Cultural development is the process of a child realizing and understanding their own cultural identity. It is important that the child care environment be respectful of the child’s cultural heritage, racial ancestry and identity, and spiritual/religious faith. It is important for providers to role model respect and consideration for others whose perspectives and experiences that are different from their own.