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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRICULUM  
FRAMEWORK (DRAFT)

Ministry Of Women and  
Child Development  
Government of India

# Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework (Draft)



MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

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## Introduction

The first six years of life are critical years of human life since the rate of development in these years is more rapid than at any other stage of development. Global brain research also informs us about the significance of early years for brain development.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) makes a positive contribution to children's long term development and learning by facilitating an enabling and stimulating environment in these foundation stages of lifelong learning.

Parents as caregivers are critical in providing a stimulating learning environment to the child and the first two and a half to three years need not be in a formal learning environment. The National Curriculum Framework acknowledges the significance of involvement of parents, family and community.

The programme at the early childhood stage helps to ensure opportunities for holistic learning and growth. The ECCE programme needs to be determined by children's developmental and contextual needs, providing for more need based inputs and an enabling environment. Given this need for an individualised approach, it was believed that a common 'curriculum' would not be appropriate for all. However, over the years it has been observed that the practical realities are different and most of the ECCE programmes on offer currently do not have developmentally appropriate programmes for the young child. The vacuum created by a lack of curriculum framework has resulted in its being filled with either a minimalist programme or the downward extension of the primary stage curriculum.

To ensure optimal development for all children, there is a need to create a planned curriculum framework, encompassing developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills, with flexibility for contextualization. A curriculum framework is also required to ensure that important learning areas are covered, taking care of all the developmental needs of the young child. It also facilitates adoption of a common pedagogical approach to reach for a certain level of quality and address the widespread diversity in the ECCE programmes available for the young children in India.

This Curriculum Framework is in line with the Government's vision of ECCE as spelt out in the National Early Childhood Care & Education Policy and is a broad framework of basic guidelines for curricular goals, programme content, classroom practices, parent guidance

and teacher preparation across different provisions and across all regions. The purpose of this open framework is to promote quality and excellence in early childhood education by providing guidelines for practices that would promote optimum learning and development of all young children and set out the broad arrangement of approaches and experiences rather than detailed defining of the content. A cautious approach is being adopted to not provide a detailed curriculum/syllabus which would be prescriptive and ‘delivered’ to the young children in a ‘straight jacketed manner’. The Curriculum Framework calls attention to the common principles and developmental tasks, at the same time, respecting the diversity in the child rearing practices and contextual ECCE needs.

Each programme is expected to develop its own curriculum to meet the needs of its children, their families, the specific setting, the linguistic culture and the local community. However, the programmes should be based on the curriculum principles and guidelines laid down in this framework.

This Framework is a dynamic document and would be continually reviewed and evolved in the light of emerging needs. Also, with the adoption of the framework, case studies of emerging best practices will follow and learnings from them would further strengthen the framework.

This Framework is firmly focussed on the needs of the child and should lead to improved quality of learning and increased attainment of learning outcomes for children participating in ECCE programmes. The other components for the holistic ECCE programme such as nutrition, health and care are to be ensured by cross reference from related instruments.

### **Objectives of Early Childhood Education**

The aim of Early Childhood Care and Education is to facilitate optimum development of the child’s full potential and lay the foundation for all round development and lifelong learning.

This aim is to be achieved through enabling the child to:

- Develop a positive self-concept.
- Establish a sound foundation for a good physique, adequate muscular coordination and basic motor skills.

- Imbibe good health habits and basic life skills/ self-help skills necessary for personal social adjustment.
- Enhance verbal and non- verbal communication skills which would facilitate expression of thoughts and feelings in fluent, correct, clear speech.
- Develop the five senses and cognitive skills and concepts which are foundation for higher order thinking and reasoning.
- Develop emotional maturity by guiding the child to express, understand, accept and control feelings and emotions.
- Imbibe values, social attitudes and manners important in his/her socio cultural context and to become sensitive to rights and privileges of others.
- Develop independence, aesthetic appreciation and creativity by providing child with sufficient opportunities for self-expression and active exploration, investigation and experimentation.
- Make a smooth transition from preschool to primary through development of emergent literacy and school readiness.

### **Principles of Early Learning**

**Learning begins from birth:** From infancy children are mentally and physically active. They learn through all their senses and stimulations.

**Children construct knowledge:** They construct their own knowledge or working models while they actively engage in their environment and through repeated interactions with people and materials. This simply means that children touch, taste, shake things etc. to find out what happens and learn about things in their environment.

**Children’s curiosity and desire to learn:** Children are curious and eager to learn. They have an inherent need to make sense of their experiences and learn about the world around them.

**Children learn through play:** Play is central to the child’s well-being and development Children’s spontaneous play provides opportunities for exploration, experimentation, manipulation and problem solving that are essential for constructing knowledge. Play contributes to the development of representational thought.

**Child development and learning are characterized by individual variation:** No two children are same. Each child has an individual pattern and timing of growth and development as well as individual styles of learning. Children’s personal, family experiences and cultural backgrounds also vary.

**Children’s learning reflects a recurring spiral that begins in awareness, and moves to exploration, to inquiry, and finally, to application.** Any new learning by children begins with awareness, which is generated from their experiences with objects, events, or people and ends with utilization, where children are able to use what they have learnt for multiple purposes and apply their learning to new situations. At this stage children start exploring the next level of information and the spiral continues.

**Children need to experience success more than failure to form a positive self-concept:** The experiences should be planned in accordance with the maturational level of the children, such that they are challenging yet achievable, so as to promote self-confidence. When children have confidence in themselves, they do better. They are eager to try new and harder things; they gain new skills and become more confident and capable.

**Children develop holistically and benefit from integrated experiences and education:** Learning and development of children takes place in totality. All the domains of development i.e. physical, motor, cognitive, language, socio-personal, emotional and creative and aesthetic appreciation are interrelated and take place simultaneously.

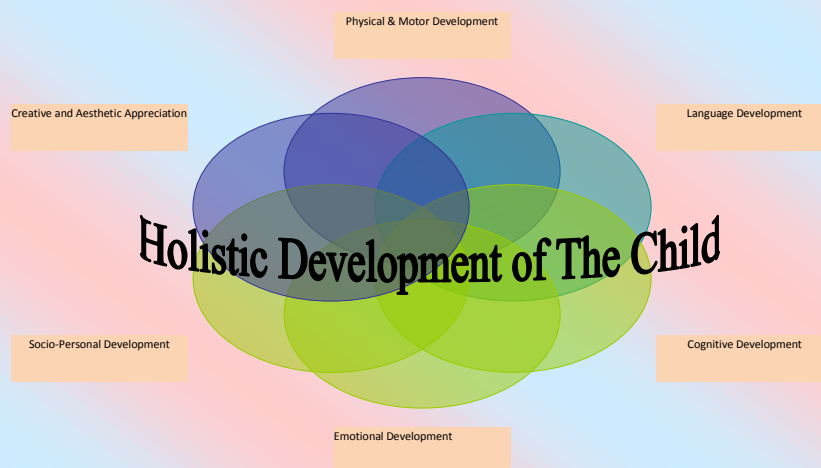
## Curriculum Content

The curriculum must address the following interrelated domains of holistic development through an integrated and play based approach which focuses on development of life skills.

- **Physical and Motor Development:** Gross motor skills; coordination of fine muscles with dexterity ; eye hand coordination; sense of balance, physical co-ordination, and awareness of space and direction; nutrition, health status and practices.
- **Language Development:** Listening and comprehension; oral skills/speaking and communicating; vocabulary development; pre- literacy/emergent literacy skills like phonological awareness; print awareness and concepts; letter- sound

correspondence; recognition of letters; building words and sentences and early writing. Introduction to language of school transaction.

- **Cognitive Development:** Development of various concepts including pre number and number concepts and operations (knowledge and skills related to comparing, classification, seriation, conservation of space and quantity, one to one correspondence; counting); spatial sense; patterns and estimations in measurement; data handling; skills related to sequential thinking, critical thinking, observing, reasoning and problem solving; and knowledge about concepts and physical, social and biological environment.
- **Socio-Personal and Emotional Development:** Development of self-concept; self-control; life skills/ self-help skills; habit formation; initiative and curiosity; engagement and persistence; cooperation; compassion; social relationships; group interaction; pro- social behaviour; expressing feelings, accepting others feelings.
- **Sensorial Development:** Development of the five senses through visual, auditory and kinaesthetic experiences.
- **Development of Creative and Aesthetic Appreciation:** Exploring different art forms, develop dispositions, expression and appreciation for artistic, dance/ drama and musical activities





<u><b>ECCE is.....</b></u>	<u><b>ECCE is not.....</b></u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A balanced play based programme of language, cognitive, creative and psychomotor activities</li> <li>• A child centered programme catering to individual children’s learning &amp; emotional needs through individual, small and large group activities and one to one communication.</li> <li>• A school readiness programme which ‘readies’ children for learning to read, write and do arithmetic later.</li> <li>• A programme which indirectly promotes self-control and thereby inner discipline in children through interactions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A syllabus bound programme for teaching 3R’s nor ‘a song and a rhyme and go home’ approach.</li> <li>• A teacher centred programme that follows formal classroom approach as in school</li> <li>• A program for formally ‘teaching’ reading, writing and arithmetic, which is to be done in primary.</li> <li>• Not a programme which demands unquestioning obedience or exercise strict classroom discipline</li> </ul>

(Source: Kaul, V. (2010): Early Childhood Education Programme. National Council for Educational Research and Training)

**The ECCE programme should ensure ‘holistic development’ of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education by comprehensively addressing the need for care, nutrition, health and well-being of young children and parent counselling along with supporting the development of all domains. The holistic development approach is vital for provision of interconnected and interrelated activities covering all domains of development.**

### **Suggestive Developmentally Appropriate/Age appropriate Activities for ECCE**

#### For Children Under 3 years

- ❖ Focus on health, nutrition and early psycho social stimulation through free play and a lot of adult child interaction. Eg.s., (infant games, traditional songs & syllables, access to variety of play materials, individualized adult attention and interaction, opportunities to explore, early introduction to stories, infant books, drawings etc.) in safe, spacious and clean environment.

### For Children between 3 to 4 years

- ❖ Planned play based programme for all round development with more of free play. Continuous opportunities, more free but some guided, for adult –child, child to child

#### **Basic Tenets of Curriculum Development**

- Based on needs and capacities of young children
- Recognition of special features of children’s thinking
- Mix of formal and informal interaction
- Familiarity and challenge in everyday rhythm
- Primacy of experience rather than expertise
- Developmentally appropriate practice and flexibility
- Use of local material, arts and knowledge which reflect the diversity and culture of the children.

Source: Position Paper, National Focus Group on ECCE, 2005

interaction and interaction with play materials and environment through a variety of individual, small group and large group activities.

- ❖ Opportunities to listen to stories, learn rhymes, create, indulge in imaginative play, ask questions, do simple problem solving, experiment to promote active and interactive learning and generally have a ‘feel good’ experience for a positive self-image.

### For Children between 4 to 6 years

Moving towards an increasing ratio of adult guided vs. free play activities, and more of large group activities for 4-5 year old and focused more on specific school readiness for 5-6 year old, with increasing complexity in all of above.

- ❖ Reading Readiness: e.g. picture –sound matching, shapes, phonetics; increasing vocabulary; verbal expression, developing bond with and interest in reading through picture books, storytelling, charts etc.

- ❖ Writing Readiness: e.g. eye hand coordination, interest in writing, left to right directionality.
- ❖ Math: developing skills in classification, seriation, pattern making, reasoning, problem solving, forming concepts: pre number and number concepts and space concepts and vocabulary, environment concepts.
- ❖ Motor development: fine motor development through activities such as beading, peg-boards and puzzles and large muscle development through running, jumping, balancing activities etc.
- ❖ Creativity and aesthetic appreciation: Creative drama, cultural activities, field trips etc. The programme should be relevant to individual and societal needs. The age demarcations are indicative and the activities have to be planned according to the developmental level of the children.

### Principles of Programme Planning

- The activities should be age and developmentally appropriate.
- Activities fostering all domains of development should be appropriately planned.
- The attention span of young children is 15-20 minutes; therefore the duration of activities should be 20 minutes, with additional time allotted for winding up and initiation of the next activity. However, the programme should allow space and flexibility for need based variations.
- There should be a balance between structured and unstructured; active and quiet; outdoor and indoor; self-directed and adult initiated learning opportunities and individual, small group and large group activities.
- The experiences should progress from simple to complex.
- A wide range of individual and group experiences should be planned which are related to the child's environment, are enjoyable and challenging for children.
- Routine fosters a sense of security in children. Therefore some routine should be followed in the daily programme.
- The ECCE programme should never be rigid.

- The duration of the pre-school programmes should be 3 to 4 hours. The programme should provide for some rest period during the day and if it is of longer duration, as a full day programme, then a nap time is to be ensured.
- Learning opportunities should be interconnected, linking learning experiences across developmental domains in a meaningful context, reflecting the real life context of the children.
- The language used should be the mother tongue of the child. Efforts should be made to extend their language sensitively and introduce the school language gradually to facilitate school readiness.
- Curriculum goal and objectives should guide classroom process and assessment of the children. The curriculum should be implemented in a manner that reflects responsiveness to family/ home values, beliefs and experiences.
- The programme should provide opportunities for exploration and experiential learning, promoting active engagement with people and objects in the environment.

### **Outcomes of Early Childhood Education Curriculum**

Children who

- Communicate effectively
- Display emergent literacy skills, mathematical skills and scientific temperament
- Express emotions in socially acceptable manner, are socially adaptive and cooperative
- Have physical control, strength and healthy habits

### **Pedagogical Approaches**

The curriculum adopts a play and activity based approach. Children are visualised as active beings who construct their own knowledge and the process of teaching –learning is one of co-construction of knowledge, with adults as facilitators.

Various approaches are practised for transacting the Early Childhood Education programme. Some commonly adopted approaches are:

**Montessori Method:** This method is characterized by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child's natural psychological development and is transacted through specialised sensorial material.

**Regio Emilia:** Based on the work of Loris Mallaguzi, this is a constructivist approach which focuses on creation of a learning environment that enhances and facilitates children's construction of their own thinking through the combination of communicative, expressive and cognitive languages as they engage actively with people, material and environment.

**Progressive Method:** This is an eclectic approach which draws from the major child development theories. Recognizing the many paths of learning, latest researches and contemporary work lay the foundation of this framework.

**Thematic Approach:** Integrated themes and projects form the core content of the curriculum. These themes should enable the children to make meaningful connections among the different concepts and develop holistic understanding of the world around them. The curriculum should be flexible and responsive to the needs of the children in the class. It is to be constructed to suit the diverse social, cultural, linguistic contexts in the country, and initiate integrated learning.

A programme can adopt any of the above mentioned approaches to transact the curriculum. An integrated daily/ weekly/ monthly programme should be prepared with a well-rounded selection of learning experiences that strengthen all domains of development and are age and developmentally appropriate. The activities for different domains and concepts should be planned purposefully to enable a child to actively engage with and experience the concepts. These will help to consolidate the learning and lay the foundations for future.

Caution should be observed to not equate the curriculum to just an exercise of organising activities, rather it should be viewed as a planned and purposeful intervention and adult child and child to child interaction to facilitate the process of knowing, understanding and construction of knowledge by the children. The aim of the curriculum should be to foster

development through integrated activities rather than mere completion of worksheets or repetitive exercises and activities.

To address the needs of the large group of children in one class and multi-age setting, the strategy would be to conduct the activities in large group, small group and individual level.

### Essential Play and Learning Material

In early childhood stage, a child learns through interacting with immediate environment hence environment should be stimulating and should have a variety of materials to arouse and sustain the child's curiosity, interest and promote his learning.

- Adequate supply of developmentally appropriate play materials to foster all round development should be available at the ECCE centre
- The materials should be safe, clean and in good conditions. Sufficient quantity should be available to work in small groups and it should be easily accessible to the child.
- The materials should promote gross and fine motor development and help the child to discover and explore including constructing and reconstructing. It should promote sensory exploration and social interaction along with creative expressions through arts, painting, etc.



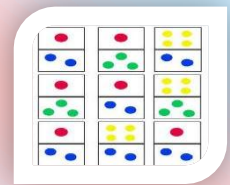
### Some essential play materials are

#### Indoor Material

- Blocks for constructive play
- Manipulative toys



- Material for imaginative play /Dramatic play – dolls, puppets, masks, kitchen sets, mirrors, old spectacle frames, purses, old shoes, weighting scales, clock etc.
- Material to develop Language skills – books and picture books, storytelling aid, puppets, story cards, sound board, conversation cards, flash cards, picture dominoes, collection of rhymes and stories, visual discrimination and auditory and visual association materials, slates, chalks, crayons, blackboard, drawing paper, etc.
- Material to develop cognitive skills – sound boxes, visual discrimination cards, touch cards, feel bag, food items of varying kind to develop sensory skills, number domino cards, picture jigsaw and self-correcting puzzles for matching, sorting, arranging, classifying, problem solving, memory and sequential thinking to develop cognitive skills and materials in the environment
- Musical instruments



- Art material for creative expression such as paints, crayons, pencil, paint brushes, cotton, threads, clay, knife, papers, scissors, cloth, gum and fevicol, bead, etc.

In addition to locally available material, teachers/caregivers can develop play and learning material for specific activities planned in the programme.

### Outdoor Materials

- Play equipment to build balancing, jumping, climbing, swinging, swaying, cycling, etc.
- Materials like large or small balls, old tyres, rings, etc. for throwing, catching, kicking, rolling, etc.



- Sand and water play arrangement with sand pit, mugs, spoons, cups, bucket, sieves, strainer, etc.



## Assessment

Assessment is an essential and integral component of any ECCE programme to ensure that the programme remains child centric and the experiences and activities are planned according to the level of the child. It gives an insight into children's interests, achievements and possible difficulties in their learning from which next steps in learning and teaching can be planned and thereby provides a platform to support the planning of a coherent curriculum for progression in learning. In order to ensure that the programme is responsive to the developmental needs of the child, it is essential to maintain their developmental and learning profile.

The purpose of assessment is to give useful information about children's learning and development to the adults providing the programme as also to children and their families. It also helps ensure early identification of developmental delays, special educational needs and particular abilities. Assessment contributes to evaluation, revision, and development of programmes.

### The areas of assessment

- The child's interest and participation
- Skills and abilities
- Social interactions

The assessment of the children should be formative, continuous and flow from the experiences planned in the curriculum. Formative continuous assessment implies documenting the development of the child, by interpreting the evidence from the day to day experiences of the child with the purpose of recognising and encouraging strengths and addresses learning/developmental gaps.

Teachers need to evaluate each child's progress on an ongoing basis, through observations of their behaviour; their artwork and other products. Home-based observations may also be





conducted. The current level of performance should be rewarded to reinforce small steps of accomplishments towards the long term goals.

Portfolio should be maintained for individual child. It should contain anecdotal records, developmental checklists, samples of drawing, writing and other activities, observation notes and parent teacher meeting notes.

### Role of Caregiver/Teacher

The caregivers/ teachers in an ECCE programme are facilitators who engage children in multiple experiences to foster their all-round development.

They play the following roles:

- Observe children to identify their needs and capabilities and move with the pace of the child's development
- Plan developmentally appropriate, holistic and challenging activities
- Focus not only on planning and conducting activities but also on continuous processes for interaction and relating learning to child's environment.
- Create nurturing and positive relationships with children and among children
- Organise supportive learning environment by taking care of aspects such as the arrangement of the physical environment and equipment; the scheduling of activities and events and groupings
- Work in partnership with parents
- Facilitate learning to meet the objectives of the curriculum
- Help in early identification and intervention for children with special needs



To accomplish the above the teachers need to enjoy being with young children, be knowledgeable about children's development and early childhood curriculum and should be skilled at implementing the curriculum.

### Role of Parent

The young child spends most of the time at home and much of the early learning occurs through the child's day to day interactions with the family. The parents have a major role to play in the child's development, much beyond merely being around the child and providing food and other basic needs. Parents need to:



- Provide a conducive environment at home for optimal development and learning and spend quality time with the child
- Encourage exploration and experimentation at home and optimally utilise the ample opportunities for incidental and lifelong learning arising from the daily activities
- Play a cooperative role and establish a relationship of trust and mutual respect with the teacher/caregiver at the ECCE centre
- Share and plan the development of their child along with the teacher/caregiver
- Participate in the open days and other events for parents and community
- Not to force formal learning and competition at this early age and respect children's abilities and personalities.

### Supportive Essentials

The open framework approach to curriculum adopted herein requires certain preconditions as essentials. These are:

- An enabling and stimulating learning environment which has been carefully designed and is child friendly

- Contextually and culturally appropriate curriculum content
- Developmentally appropriate learning and play material
- Activity; rhyme and story bank
- Children’s Activity Book
- Trainer’s Manual and Teacher’s Guidebook addressing adult-child interaction, arrangement of the physical environment and equipment, planning of the daily routine etc. to help teachers implement the curriculum effectively
- Supportive supervision
- Professional development opportunity for ECCE caregivers



## Annexure 1

### Some Significant Themes to be covered in the Curriculum

Myself, my family and community

Food, health, hygiene and cleanliness

Natural world and environment: plants; animals and birds; fruits and vegetables

Physical environment: air, water, universe, seasons

Social environment: My country; festivals and celebrations; neighbourhood; means of transport

## Annexure 2

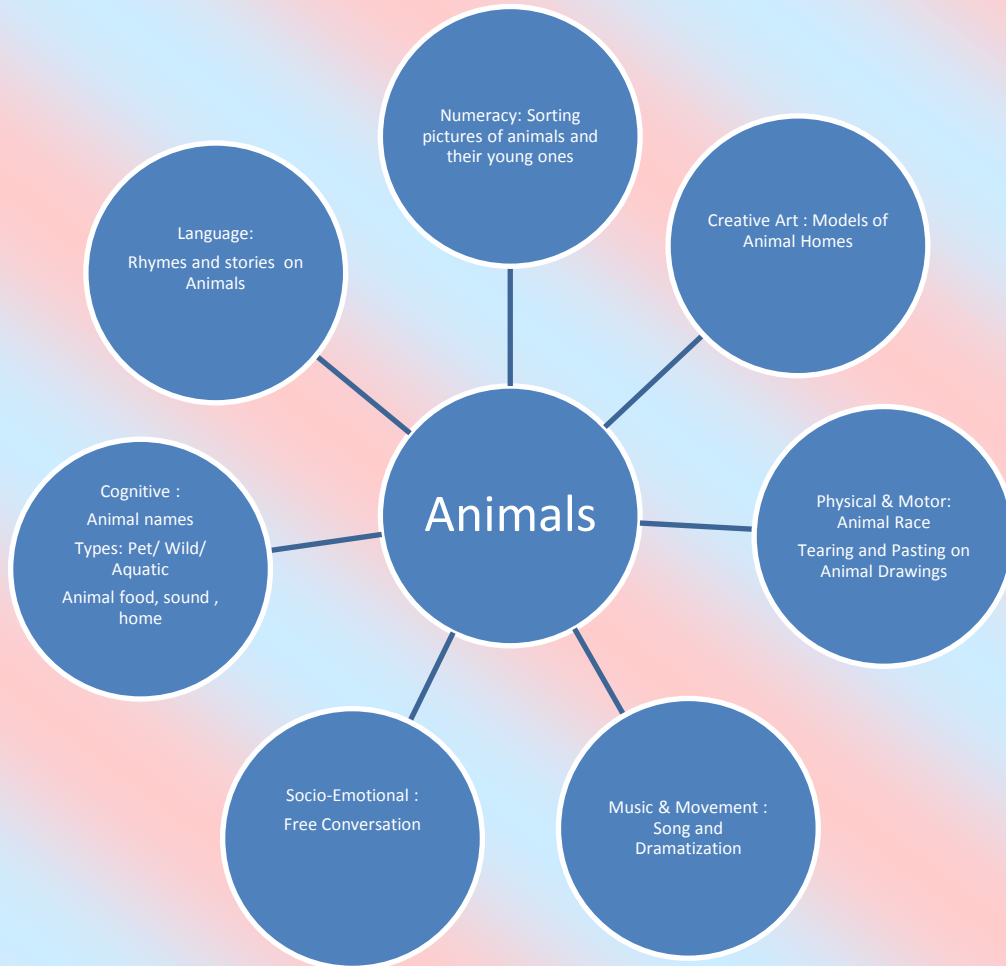
## Sample Weekly Plan

## Theme: Animals

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9.00-9.30	Circle Time	Assembly	Circle Time	Assembly	Circle Time
9.30-10.00	Free Conversation (Animal Names)	Guided Conversation (Homes of Animals)	Free Conversation (Food of Animals)	Guided Conversation (Animals and their young ones)	Guided Conversation (Uses of Animals)
10.00-10.30	Seriation Activity (Small to large animal)	Sorting Cards (Animals and their young ones)	Soft and Hard Surface	Shape: Circle	Pattern Writing
10.30-11.00	Animal Race	Block Play	Swings and slides	Walking on Zigzag line	Sand Pit
11.00-11.30	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
11.30-12.00	Free hand drawing of pet animals	Tearing and pasting on animal drawings	Models of animal homes	Making Clay Animals	Mask Making
12.00-12.30	Animal Rhyme (Pet Animals)	Music and Movement Activity (How animals move)	Rhyme Dramatization (Farm Animals)	Animal Story (Wild Animals)	Song and Dance (Birds)
12.30-1.00	Winding up & Departure	Winding up & Departure	Winding up & Departure	Winding up & Departure	Winding up & Departure

Note: The time allotted for each activity is 15-20 minutes; the time slots of 30 minutes allotted in the plan include setting up, distribution of material and winding up for each activity.

### Annexure 3 Sample Thematic Web



### Important Resources

1. Bhatnagar, R (2005): Little Steps. A Manual for Preschool Teachers. National Council for Educational Research and Training. New Delhi
2. Kaul, V. (2010): Early Childhood Education Programme. National Council for Educational Research and Training. New Delhi
3. Mother and Child Protection Card, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.
4. Muralidharan, R., Asthana, S. (1991): Stimulation Activities for Young Children. National Council for Educational Research and Training. New Delhi
5. Position Paper on Early Childhood Care and Education, National Focus Group (2006). National Council for Educational Research and Training. New Delhi
6. Soni, R, Kapoor R, Vashishtha, K. K. (2008): Early Childhood Education. An Introduction. National Council for Educational Research and Training. New Delhi
7. Swaminathan, M. and Daniel, P. (2004): Play Activities for Child Development: A Guide to Preschool Teachers. National Book Trust, New Delhi.
8. WHO Child Growth Standards- Methods and Development, World Health Organisation