



Frequently Asked Questions: Embedded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) for Infants and Toddlers



This is one in a series of Inclusion-focused frequently asked questions (FAQs) for educators and special education staff. Below you'll find answers to FAQs about ELOs for Infants and Toddlers.

What are ELOs?

ELOs are short interactions that teach important, everyday skills in meaningful contexts. For infants and toddlers, these interactions occur during typical daily activities, routines, and transitions. They are designed to focus on a child's individual learning objective or target, including the goals set in an Individualized Family Service Plan.

Why use ELOs?

Embedded Learning Opportunities support infants and toddlers to learn important functional skills and then apply these skills across settings and with other people. ELOs maximize motivation by taking advantage of the child's interests. Using ELOs should require minimal changes to the child's regular activities and routines.

What are some examples of learning objectives that can be embedded for infants and toddlers?

Educators can use ELOs to support infants and toddlers with a variety of learning objectives — such as drinking from a cup or using a spoon, pointing in order to make a request, imitating sounds and actions, scooping and dumping, washing hands, and putting on shoes. ELOs can also be used to help an infant or toddler navigate social emotional situations, such as making a choice, waiting for a turn, or asking for help.

What are some examples of activities, routines, and transitions for infants and toddlers?

Examples of activities that lend themselves to embedded learning include playing with blocks, looking at books, and going for a walk. Routines could include diapering, meal times, washing hands, and bath time. Transitions might include putting on a jacket to go outside, preparing for a nap, or end-of-day activities, such as getting into the car seat. Activities, routines, and transitions can happen at home, in an early learning setting, and out in the community.

What are the steps to implementing ELOs?

The steps to providing ELOs to infants and toddlers are:

- Planning what will be taught and when
 - What to teach: the learning objective
 - When to teach: the activities, routines, and transitions



- Implementing the plan
 - How to teach
- Evaluating if the teaching was effective
 - How to monitor progress

How are ELOs planned?

Planning ELOs means considering what and when to teach. First, define the learning objective. This should be an important, functional, and developmentally appropriate skill you and the family would like the infant or toddler to learn.

Next, identify activities, routines, or transitions throughout the day during which you will teach the new skill. Communication between families and educators about challenges and successes the infant or toddler typically faces during daily activities can help to identify moments where the learning objective would likely occur as a natural part of participation.

How are ELOs implemented?

- Plan ahead of time how you will interact with the child to teach the new skill.
- Plan for the environmental or adult-provided cue that will initiate the new skill.
- Give the child the right amount of help, if needed.
- Provide time for the child to respond.
- Give feedback based on the child's response — either reinforcing successes or providing gentle corrections.

How are ELOs evaluated?

Monitor the child's progress toward the learning objective by observing and collecting information. This could include taking notes or photos, counting successes, and collecting samples of the child's language or play. Evaluate the effectiveness of embedded learning by considering and making changes based on three questions:

- Am I doing it consistently and according to plan?
- Is it working?
- What changes are needed?

Where can I learn more about ELOs in general?

The [Head Start Early Childhood and Learning Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\) website](#) offers a variety of practical guides, activity matrices, information, and videos about Embedded Learning Opportunities in early learning settings, which can be used with infants and toddlers.

Additionally, you can find related information about [Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning](#) and [The Teaching Loop](#), which can also be used in infant and toddler settings.

Are ELOs supported by research evidence?

Embedded instruction is one of the [Division for Early Childhood \(DEC\) Recommended Practices](#). Instruction Practice 5 states, "Practitioners embed instruction within and across routines, activities, and environments to provide contextually relevant learning opportunities." The practice is supported by a variety of research evidence.



How do ELOs for infants and toddlers fit into the Head Start Program Performance Standards?

The Head Start Program Performance Standards make specific mention of supporting development and learning in the context of daily routines and activities:

- **Teaching and the learning environment, 45 CFR §1302.31**
 - "(c) Learning environment. A program must ensure teachers implement well-organized learning environments with developmentally appropriate schedules, lesson plans, and indoor and outdoor learning experiences that provide adequate opportunities for choice, play, exploration, and experimentation among a variety of learning, sensory, and motor experiences and:
 - (1) For infants and toddlers, promote relational learning and include individualized and small group activities that integrate appropriate daily routines into a flexible schedule of learning experiences..."
 - "(e) Promoting learning through approaches to rest, meals, routines, and physical activity"
 - (2) A program must implement snack and meal times in ways that support development and learning. For bottle-fed infants, this approach must include holding infants during feeding to support socialization. Snack and meal times must be structured and used as learning opportunities that support teaching staff-child interactions and foster communication and conversations that contribute to a child's learning, development, and socialization..."
 - (3) A program must approach routines, such as hand washing and diapering, and transitions between activities, as opportunities for strengthening development, learning, and skill growth."