



HEAD START PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS SUPPORT MAKE-BELIEVE PLAY!

Part 1302 — Program Operations

- Subpart C — Education and Child Development Program Services
 - 1302.30 Purpose
 - 1302.31 Teaching and the learning environment
 - 1302.35 Education in home-based programs

All programs must provide high-quality early education and child development services that include children with disabilities and promote children’s cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Teaching practices should not only provide learning experiences that support all developmental domains in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF), but also foster trust and security. Practices also need to support children’s developmental progressions by intentionally creating an environment that builds on children’s individual development and learning patterns. Additionally, home-based programs must encourage parents as the child’s first teacher and support parents as they provide high-quality make-believe play experiences.

1. Children’s success in make-believe play is linked to school readiness. As children move from object-oriented play in infancy to high-level make-believe play in the preschool years, they learn language, math concepts, self-regulation, and social skills—all important elements to school readiness. Therefore, it is important to provide a high-quality learning environment that promotes learning with interesting materials for infants and toddlers to manipulate and brings preschoolers’ everyday experiences into the classroom for them to act out.
2. The Cognition, Language and Literacy, and Social and Emotional Development domains of the ELOF support children’s make-believe play. Children start by imitating facial expressions during infancy. Soon, they begin to understand that an object can stand for another object—symbolic representation. These are ELOF goals across the developmental continuum for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
3. Supporting children’s make-believe play is present in much of what you do. This is not an additional curriculum piece to add to your planning and practices. When you provide children with interesting materials to manipulate or pretend with during daily interactions and model pretend behaviors, you support make-believe development and growth. You can further support children who are dual language learners or children who are learning a tribal language. Talk with families about acceptable make-believe themes, dress-up attire, or behaviors to meet the children’s needs while being culturally considerate.

