

Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals Area I: Health, Safety and Nutrition Practices

Rationale:

Children's growth and development, learning, and overall well-being are dependent on safe and healthy physical and psychological environments and on sound nutrition. Competent early childhood professionals, therefore, know their responsibilities under applicable laws and regulations, and they develop policies and procedures to ensure healthy practices that are sensitive to families, employ teaching practices that support children as they become increasingly independent, and work collaboratively with other professionals to make community resources available to children and their families.

Knowledge:

Children thrive when their most basic needs of health, safety, and nutrition are met.

- Health, safety and nutrition practices match children's developmental stages and individual needs.
- Healthy, safe environments respect both the physical and social-emotional well-being of young children from birth to kindergarten by addressing issues of sanitation, hand washing, use of universal precautions and appropriate responses to emergency care situations that respect children and their diverse reactions to people, places, and situations.
- Early childhood professionals maintain the confidentiality of health records and health information.

Threats to health and safety such as diseases or physical, sexual, and psychological abuse or neglect are often manifested in observable physical, emotional, or behavioral symptoms.

Families hold values and concerns regarding health, safety, and nutrition for their children that reflect their personal and cultural beliefs.

- Families participate with early childhood professionals in developing health, safety, and nutrition policies and practices.
- Families share information about their individual children's health needs (particularly for children who are medically fragile or who have disabilities) and work collaboratively with early childhood professionals to ensure that their children's needs are met.
- Families share information about their children's food preferences, allergies, and cultural practices.

Children engage in active learning experiences to develop health-promoting self-help skills and to construct an understanding of health, safety, and nutrition.

- Children make choices among activities and use a variety of materials and equipment in safe, but challenging, environments both inside and outside.
- Children know and rehearse evacuation and other safety procedures with guidance from early childhood professionals.
- Children develop self-help skills as they dress for the weather, wash their hands, serve themselves snacks and meals, assist in preparing foods, select toys and participate in clean-up activities.
- Children engage in activities that allow them to be active and quiet.



Community resources and health support services are available for children and their families through early childhood programs.

- Health screenings are available for young children.
- Information on community and health resources is made available to families.
- Provision of needed services to medically fragile children and to those with special needs is facilitated.

Practices Based on Knowledge:

Sound health, safety, and nutritional practices provide the foundation for development and learning. Competent early childhood professionals, therefore, demonstrate knowledge related to:

1. Policies, Practices, and Procedures

Ensure that children's basic needs of health, safety, and nutrition are met by implementing health policies, practices, and procedures that support children and their families in maintaining healthy lives, preventing injuries and preparing them to respond appropriately to emergencies or injuries;

2. Abuse/Neglect

Are alert to indicators of possible illness and to child abuse or neglect and are prepared to respond appropriately if such indicators are observed;

3. Nutrition and Dietary Practices

Implement dietary practices that support healthy growth and development while remaining sensitive to family preferences;

4. Communication with Families

Communicate with families about health and dietary concerns as well as about community resources that support healthy living for children and their families; and

5. Health Education

Implement practices that allow children to become independent and knowledgeable about healthy living.



Competency	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
Early childhood professionals at ALL LEVELS have knowledge related to:	Professionals at Level I implement practices according to program guidelines and policies. They:	Professionals at Level II demonstrate the skills present at the previous level. In addition, they work independently and take initiative in designing environments to facilitate development. They:	Professionals at Level III demonstrate the skills present at the previous levels. In addition, they design, assess, and modify the learning environment to meet children's changing needs. They also model excellent practices and encourage others to develop proficiency in skills. They:	Professionals at Level IV demonstrate the skills present at the previous levels. In addition, they provide leadership for planning, implementing, assessing, and modifying the program to ensure continuous improvement. They conduct inquiry to advance the understanding of best practices for their communities. They:

1. Policies, Practices, and Procedures

1.1 General Policies/Procedures	Follow laws, regulations, policies, and procedures for health, safety, and nutrition such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing a daily health check • Documenting health information • Monitoring for up-to-date immunizations and routine health screenings as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control of the United States Public Health Service (CDC-USPHS), and the Academy of Family Practice, taking action to ensure that the services are obtained as a condition for entry or continued enrollment • Maintaining emergency contact information • Identifying and delineating instructions for child's health needs (e.g., allergies or chronic illness) 	Implement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies regarding confidentiality, health, safety, and nutrition • Health assessments of children • Arrangement for advice from health consultant (as needed) 	Implement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health assessments • Recommend referral and ongoing follow-up to community health and social service agencies 	Analyze, evaluate, and apply current theory and research related to health, safety, and nutrition policies and procedures.
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<p>1.2 Control of Communicable Disease</p>	<p>Routinely wash hands (adults and children) according to best practices recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Examples include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before and after eating/handling food, administering medication, and playing with water used by more than one person • After diapering, toileting, handling bodily fluids, handling pets or animals, and playing in sand boxes • Before and after feeding a child • After arrival at center or when moving from one group of children to another • When leaving the center for the day • After handling garbage, raw meat or cleaning • Sanitize toys, surfaces, and other items that come in contact with body fluids after each child's use (e.g., after child puts toy in mouth) • Clean table and counter surfaces daily (additionally when needed) • Weekly clean toys not in contact with body fluids (additionally as needed) • Use universal precautions to avoid/control blood-borne pathogens (e.g., where bodily fluids come in contact with surfaces used by others such as in the diapering area, food service area) <p><i>(continued)</i></p>	<p>Assess each child's health status daily, objectively document and, if signs of communicable disease are observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify authorized person • Isolate the child from contact with others until picked up by an authorized person 	<p>Maintain current knowledge regarding health, safety, and nutrition concerns in the community in order to inform families and to develop or to update procedures</p>	<p>Provide leadership for developing and implementing procedures to prevent the spread of communicable disease, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop plan for sharing information with families • Inform others when it is necessary to secure services of health consultant • Establish plan for interim care of children who show symptoms of communicable disease and must be isolated until picked up • Arrange an agreement with health consultant for ongoing consultation to prevent spread of disease

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1.2 Control of Communicable Disease (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolate or exclude individuals with symptoms of communicable disease • Use appropriate procedures for diapering or changing clothes in case of toileting accidents • Use appropriate procedures for handling food • Separate food preparation and consumption areas from diapering or toileting areas • Communicate with families of children exposed to communicable disease • Monitor water used for activities to prevent spread of disease (e.g., water must be clean, children do not drink water used for play, children with hand sores may not participate in water play) 			
1.3 Routine Oral Hygiene	<p>Implement guidelines for preventing tooth decay and spread of germs through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper cleaning of the mouths of infants who do not yet have teeth • Appropriate feeding practices (e.g., not using bottle containing milk or juice as a pacifier) • Good nutrition • Routine tooth brushing • Proper storage of toothbrushes • Plaque removal (flossing is recommended after gaps between teeth have closed) 	<p>Conduct oral health screenings for each child</p> <p>Create playful ways to engage children in oral hygiene routines</p>	<p>Provide guidance to staff and family members about oral health topics such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of tooth decay through tooth brushing • Appropriate feeding practices to prevent tooth decay • Causes of tooth decay and how adult dental health affects child's dental health • Recommendations regarding the use of fluoride • Recommendations regarding the use of tooth sealants • When to begin dental visits and the importance of finding a dental home 	<p>Maintain current knowledge of evidence-based best practices in oral health and provide leadership for implementing practices, and sharing information based on that knowledge with children, families, and staff</p>

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1.4 Reduction of Environmental Hazards	<p>Monitor the environment for hazards such as, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allergens and asthma-inducing substances • Toxic chemicals or gases • Mold • Improper or broken equipment • Extreme heat, cold, or sun • Insect-borne disease • Vehicle traffic • Safe storage and administration of medications • Animals (program or visiting pets) without proper immunizations or unsuitable for children 	<p>Implement systematic procedures to monitor environmental hazards</p> <p>Develop and implement (in consultation with appropriate agencies and consultants) both initial and ongoing methods to monitor the facility and premises for safe indoor and environmental air quality and water purity, unless on a public supply (e.g., radon, carbon monoxide, hidden sources of mold spores, improper venting, etc.)</p>	<p>Maintain current knowledge and inform others about environmental hazards</p>	<p>Maintain current knowledge of identifiable environmental hazards and risks, and establish procedures for reducing the risk of occurrence</p>
1.5 Sanitation Procedures	<p>Implement guidelines for adhering to laws/regulations and recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics for Sanitation Procedures</p>	<p>Plan routine implementation and monitoring of approved sanitation procedures</p>	<p>Model and help others implement best practices for sanitation procedures</p>	<p>Oversee the program staff, assistants, or substitutes to ensure that sanitation procedures are followed</p>
1.6 Prevention of Injuries	<p>Prevent injuries by practices such as, but not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining clutter-free space for children to play • Inspecting physical environment and equipment and removing safety hazards • Supervising children by sight and sound • Establishing and maintaining procedures that children follow in order to promote safe use of equipment • Arranging safe entry/exit areas, with special attention to motor vehicle traffic and fall hazards • Maintaining safe travel conditions (if responsible for transporting children) 	<p>Ensure that safety equipment, such as smoke alarms and fire extinguishers, child safety seats, helmets, and gun safety locks are in working condition, know how to use them, and understand that modifications are made (when needed) for children with special health needs and/or physical challenges</p>	<p>Design and monitor the learning environment to reduce the risk of preventable injuries and other emergencies (e.g., check for safety recalls on supplies, toys or equipment and follow guidance to eliminate the hazard; monitor compliance with any asbestos management plan; monitor housekeeping and maintenance routines, etc.)</p>	<p>Plan, implement, assess, and modify policies and procedures designed to eliminate preventable injuries and emergencies (e.g., assess and develop hazard management plans; traffic, transportation and pedestrian safety; injury prevention by types, such as burns, falls, drowning, poisoning, shock; environmental hazards such as lead, asbestos, etc.)</p>

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1.7 Immediate Response to Injuries	Attend to injuries according to pediatric first aid training and reporting requirements	Possess the skill and knowledge for administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)	Monitor response to injuries and make suggestions for improvement	Develop policies and procedures for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to, reporting, and documenting injuries • Analyzing injuries, near-injury incidents, and identified hazards to decrease risks (e.g., through re-engineering program methods and further training of staff and children) • Responding to emergencies for all children and staff, including those who have been identified as having special health needs or physical challenges that may need specialized intervention
1.8 Follow-Up Response to Injuries	Follow policies for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documenting and reporting injuries • Communicating with family members about an injury • Assuring the comfort and care of other children while injured persons are receiving attention 	Maintain an accessible current list of phone numbers for contacting parents and community services in the event of an injury	Model for and help others acquire skills for appropriately responding to injuries	Maintain current knowledge of correct procedures for responding to emergencies and fears, and share this information with others
1.9 Emergency Preparedness	Know and practice procedures for appropriate response (including emotional support) in the event of an emergency such as fire, severe weather, or an act of violence	Use various strategies to help children understand emergency procedures and the nature of plans to ensure their safety and care in the event of an emergency	Plan and inform others of appropriate response procedures (including emotional support) in the event of emergencies such as fire, severe weather, or an act of violence Know and use community resources available for post-event grief and recovery counseling or other assistance that may be needed in especially severe situations (e.g., serious injury or death of a child or staff, post traumatic stress following natural or manmade disasters, etc.)	Establish disaster preparedness policies/procedures and emergency response plans, including agreements with community resources for emergency assistance

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2. Abuse/Neglect				
2.1 Suspected Abuse/Neglect	Recognize signs of possible emotional distress, abuse, neglect or exploitation, and follow established procedures for documenting and reporting possible occurrences in an immediate and responsive way	Help others learn to recognize signs of possible emotional distress, abuse, neglect or exploitation, and follow established procedures for documenting and reporting possible occurrences in an immediate and responsive way	Stay up-to-date and share with others information related to recognizing, documenting, and reporting possible abuse, neglect, or exploitation	Establish procedures for documenting and reporting suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation and include this in staff training
3. Nutrition And Dietary Practices				
3.1 Nutrition	Recognize dietary needs associated with age-related development and appropriate foods for special needs of children. If food is served, it is from a menu provided by a professional who understands the dietary needs of young children.	Plan or provide input to ensure the provision of nutritious meals (if meals are served) that meet the required guidelines from the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	Plan and evaluate menus (if meals are served) or provide input to ensure that they meet guidelines for sound nutrition including special dietary concerns	Ensure that nutritional components of the program (if any) are planned, implemented, and assessed on an ongoing basis
3.2 Food Selection and Preparation	Provide clean drinking water, and, if food is served: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a variety of nutritious foods • Exercise strict attention to the safety of all children with food allergies • Serve only foods that reduce the hazard of choking and other health risks • Follow regulations regarding any food brought from home • Provide age-appropriate opportunities for children to participate in mealtime preparation or serving 	Plan and serve nutritious meals (if food is served) that meet the required guidelines (per USDA, VDH, and CACFP) and that have been prepared using methods to maintain maximum nutrition	Model and help others acquire skills needed for meeting USDA, VDH, and CACFP guidelines (if responsibilities include food selection and/or preparation)	Oversee the program to ensure that, if food is served, it is safe and nutritious and that all applicable guidelines are followed and monitored to continuous improvement

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3.3 Mealtime Behaviors	<p>Model eating behaviors for children that are conducive to healthy living including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a setting that is safe, relaxed, and conducive to conversation • Gradually introducing new foods in ways that enable children to enjoy a variety of nutritious foods 	<p>Implement these practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide eating utensils, serving equipment, tables and chairs that are the size that can be used comfortably by children • Incorporate family style meals to help children be comfortable during mealtimes and to assist children in learning self-help skills • Divide responsibility at mealtime between the adult (provide food and encouragement) and the child (decide what to eat, how much and whether to eat) 	<p>Model and share with others ways to create a mealtime atmosphere that facilitates the development of healthy eating practices</p>	<p>Oversee program to maintain nutrition and mealtime as an integrated part of the program by developing and evaluating mealtime policies that outline expectations of staff, assistants, or substitutes, and children (according to age) for mealtime</p> <p>Review curricula and program practices to integrate food and dining with appropriate opportunities to learn about food's role in culture and social customs, food production and preparation, and health and nutrition</p>
3.4 Response to Food Preferences	<p>Encourage children to eat foods being served while remaining sensitive to preferences</p>	<p>Observe children during mealtimes to become familiar with their individual eating behaviors, patterns and skills</p>	<p>Plan food-related activities that respect family and cultural beliefs and practices</p>	<p>Maintain and share with others current evidence-based research on activities and practices related to food preferences, beliefs, and practices</p>

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4. Communication with Families				
4.1 Respect	Demonstrate respect in communicating with parents regarding parental concerns for their children’s health, safety, and nutrition	Recognize and accept cultural health, safety, and nutrition practices while maintaining regulatory and science-based standards	Model and help others acquire skills to recognize and to accept cultural health, safety, and nutrition practices while maintaining regulatory and science-based standards	Work with families to develop nutritional menus that respect health and nutrition of their children, while maintaining regulatory and science-based standards
4.2 Communication Regarding Policies	Follow policies for informing families of current health concerns in the program	Identify the need for changes and/or new policies for informing families of current health concerns in the program	Plan procedures and help others develop strategies for communicating health policies and concerns	Work with families to develop, implement, and evaluate policies related to children’s health, safety, and nutrition
4.3 Communication Regarding Special Needs	Stay informed of health, safety, and nutritional needs of individual children in the program	Strategically adapt various aspects of the learning environment, curriculum activities, and interactions with others to meet special health-related needs of children	Communicate knowledge of resources for meeting special health-related needs (e.g., help families learn proper use of adaptive equipment)	Design, implement, assess, and improve systems for communicating with families regarding special needs of individual children
4.4 Communication Regarding Nutrition and Food	Communicate with families regarding the children’s eating patterns, mealtime skills, food needs, and food preferences	Coordinate with families to help ensure the program practices meet their children’s needs	Consult with families about their children’s special nutritional needs or food allergies and ensure that program adaptations are developed and implemented when necessary	Maintain and share knowledge of current theory and research on communicating with families concerning food-related issues

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5. Health Education				
5.1 Basic Health Practices	Teach and support children in effective use of hand washing procedures, and use personal health and safety practices known to enhance well-being	Facilitate children's understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic health concepts • Importance of good health • Behaviors that contribute to good health 	Design, implement, and evaluate curriculum activities emphasizing healthy bodies, healthy behaviors, and healthy environment	Analyze, evaluate, and apply current theory and research to health, safety, nutrition curriculum and teaching practices
5.2 Nutrition Education	Provide mealtime experiences that establish healthy eating habits	Use a variety of strategies (e.g., posters, displays, play experiences, cooking, demonstrations, children's stories) to facilitate children's understanding of basic nutrition concepts and healthy eating patterns	Plan and guide learning experiences that nurture healthy food choices (i.e., provide nutrition education as part of the curriculum)	Oversee the program to promote continuous improvement in planning, implementing, and assessing learning experiences related to healthy eating patterns
5.3 Safety Education	Teach children simple safety rules and practices, enforcing them consistently, including limits related to the use of equipment and space Plan and practice emergency and safety procedures for emergencies such as fire, natural or manmade disaster	Facilitate children's understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning of safety • Practices that contribute to safety at home and in the learning environment • Specific safety procedures 	Share information with staff and families about resources, including curricula and ways to facilitate children's understanding and use of safety practices	Oversee the program to promote continuous improvement in planning, developing, implementing, assessing, and improving learning experiences related to safety

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<p>5.4 Education for Healthy Self-Care</p>	<p>Talk about healthy behaviors as they are carried out during daily routines (e.g., brushing teeth, eating nutritious food, exercising)</p> <p>Model behaviors that reflect respectful care of one's own body, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal safety • Handwashing • Health-promoting eating behaviors and food choices • Oral health education (i.e., good hygiene, control of plaque, how dental caries develop, prevention of dental caries) • Taking medications • Passenger safety • Importance of rest and sleep • Dialing 911 for emergency help 	<p>Capitalize on children's interest in bodies to teach healthy self-care</p> <p>Seek and use health education materials from various sources such as health departments, health consultants, and nutrition councils</p>	<p>Integrate learning experiences on healthy lifestyles as a part of daily routines</p> <p>Model and encourage others to develop proficient skills in content and methods of early childhood education for healthy self-care</p>	<p>Oversee the program to promote continuous improvement in planning, implementing, evaluating and improving learning self-care learning experiences</p>
<p>5.5 Health and Safety Resources</p>	<p>Awareness of community health, safety, and emergency resources</p>	<p>Use community health and safety resources for benefit of children and families</p> <p>Use services of health consultant and, if food is served, the services of a dietitian, and/or public health nutritionist</p>	<p>Advocate for health, safety, and nutrition policies that will positively impact all children in the community</p>	<p>Collaborate with community groups and agencies (e.g., Department of Health, Department of Homeland Security) to identify health, safety, and nutrition issues or concerns</p> <p>Develop plans and policies for addressing those concerns; provide educational opportunities and information; and facilitate service provisions to families and their children</p>