

Early Childhood EE Programs: Guidelines for Excellence

Sample 90 minute to 2-Hour Virtual Workshop

Workshop Overview

This workshop introduces the *Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence*, a publication which is part of NAAEE's *Guidelines for Excellence* series. The *Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* comprises a set of recommendations for developing comprehensive early childhood environmental education programs or informing improvements in existing ones.

The workshop can be scaled, depending on your needs, from 90 minutes to 2 hours. Times are approximate and will vary depending on your focus and your participants.

Workshop Objectives:

- ✓ Learn the history of the *Guidelines*
- ✓ Identify how the *Guidelines* play a role in Early Childhood EE
- ✓ Collaborate with colleagues
- ✓ Explore connections to your own practice

Materials/Links Needed:

- ✓ PowerPoint/Google Slide presentation: *Early Childhood Guidelines* [Note: Feel free to edit and adapt for your own situation and style. Speaker's notes are provided for reference.]
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1w68KuDUzF6lujNliy3WxrToYBgNCVOQq/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=102344212071058778908&rtpof=true&sd=true
- ✓ Link to *Early Childhood EE Programs: Guidelines for Excellence*:
<https://eeepro.naaee.org/resource/guidelines-excellence-series>
- ✓ Activity 1 Characteristics of Young Children
- ✓ Activity 2 Digging into the Early Childhood Guidelines
- ✓ Activity 3 Young Children, Family Culture, and Nature
- ✓ Activity 4 Outdoor Play
- ✓ Activity 5 Designing Outdoor Learning Spaces
- ✓ Google Form: Workshop Evaluation. Please make a copy for your own use:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdgr_PuObpWnFuwiet6Ukrx5zhX4pWeWuhmGiLbJ4LYaII9Lg/viewform?usp=header

Introduction & Project Background

10 minutes

Provide a short overview of the *Guidelines for Excellence* and NAAEE. Adapt the slide show or use the videos provided. NOTE: Depending on your group, you may wish to include, in the introduction, the following: land acknowledgement, background information about your organization and/or the sponsoring organization, participant introductions, and an icebreaker.

Note: Much of the following assumes you will be using breakout rooms for small group work. Depending on the group and their familiarity with the online platform (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet) and applications (e.g., Canva, Google Docs) you are using, you may want to provide a quick introduction to using the chat function, the need to cut/paste URLs for use while in breakout rooms, and such.

Activities were originally designed for Jamboard which has been discontinued. We have provided PDFs of those Jamboards as models.

Brainstorming Characteristics of Young Children

10 minutes

In this activity, participants will begin to think about what distinguishes young children (birth to age 6) from older children.

Procedure:

- Ask the participants to think about their experiences with young children (birth to age 6) and what they know from research about how young children learn.
- Using Activity 1 “Characteristics of Young Children” as a model, create a workspace (Canva, Google Doc, etc) for the participants, and paste the URL into the chat.
- Ask participants to respond to the following questions: What are some characteristics of young children? How are they different from older children, youth, and adults as learners? NOTE: Participants will need to be able to write responses in the shared workspace and move their responses around during the exercise.
- Explain that they should use the “sticky notes” to write down characteristics of young children (one characteristics/sticky note) and place their response anywhere in the workspace.
- After a few minutes, ask the participants to move the “sticky notes” (their responses) around and clump them together. There is no right answer, but they may want to move those that related to physical development together, those that related to social/emotional development together, etc.
- Ask for any concluding comments/thoughts about the characteristics?
- Use the PowerPoint presentation to reinforce some of their thoughts about early childhood learners.
- Explain that we’ll be digging into the *Early Childhood Guidelines* and thinking about design characteristics for high quality early childhood environmental education programs.

Digging into the Early Childhood Guidelines

60-100 minutes*

[*Time depends on whether you complete optional activities.]

In this section of the workshop, participants will become familiar with the overall organization of the *Early Childhood Guidelines* and its six Key Characteristics. Note: The basic jig saw (groups become familiar with one of the Key Characteristics and report out on it) typically takes about an hour. Additional time would be dedicated to completing 1-3 supplementary/optional activities.

Procedure:

- Using the PowerPoint, walk the participants through the *Early Childhood Guidelines* (e.g., there are six key characteristics, each key characteristic is further defined by guidelines, and guidelines are even further defined by indicators).
- Explain that in this next activity, they will become familiar with the six key characteristics

in the *Early Childhood Guidelines*.

- Explain that they will be divided into six teams and each team will be assigned one of the six Key Characteristics – based on their breakout room number.
- Post the URL for the *Early Childhood Guidelines* in the chat and ask participants to copy the URL into their browsers. They will need to access it when they get to their breakout room. https://eeepro.naaee.org/sites/default/files/eeepro-post-files/early_childhood_ee_guidelines.pdf
- Post the URL for the Activity 2 “Digging into the Early Childhood Guidelines.” Ask them to copy this URL into their browsers.
- Explain that once in their groups, participants will have about **20 minutes** to become familiar with their assigned Key Characteristic. In the breakout rooms, they should:
 - ✓ Introduce yourselves
 - ✓ Read through the assigned Key Characteristic [focus on the guidelines and indicators and skim any boxes as you have time]
 - ✓ As a group, discuss the Key Characteristic
 - ✓ Prepare a short presentation (3-4 minutes) about your assigned Key Characteristic. In your presentation, you should provide:
 - a general overview of the Key Characteristic
 - key takeaways
 - examples from your own practice
- After about 20 minutes, bring the group back together. Explain that each group will present in order of their Key Characteristic.
- Depending on the amount of time available, it is suggested that you intersperse presentations with activities that dive a bit more deeply into the Key Characteristics. In this outline, three supplementary activities are suggested for Key Characteristics #1, #3, and #5. Each of these activities take about 10-15 minutes.
- Ask group #1 to introduce Key Characteristic #1. Use the PowerPoint slides to support their presentation.
- Highlight key points from the group presentation and any other key take aways from Key Characteristic #1.
- Depending on time, transition to the Optional Activity or continue on with the next group presentation [Key Characteristic #2]

Optional Activity: Young Children, Family Culture, and Nature 20 minutes

- After the group presentation of Key Characteristic #1, explain that they will be looking at one Guideline (1.3) a bit more closely.
- Post the URL for the Activity 3 “Young Children, Family Culture, and Nature” in the chat box and ask participants to copy this URL into their browsers.
- Explain that in their small groups they will read a short passage about young children, family culture, and nature. Ask them to follow the directions. They will have 15 minutes.
 1. Read the following passage as a group and respond to the questions.
 2. What are some nature-oriented cultural traditions you might encounter in your early childhood programs?
 3. How have these cultural traditions been honored? What are some other ways these cultural traditions or similar cultural traditions can be honored?
 4. How might you learn more about the cultural traditions of the children you serve?
 5. Create an illustration of the role of culture in early childhood environmental education.

Young Children, Family Culture, and Nature

Young children are embedded in their family culture. The child's cultural background includes the beliefs and practices related to daily life and child rearing (e.g., eating, sleeping, clothing, guidance and discipline, routines, relationships with others) as well as the family's home language and religious, ethnic, political, and geographic characteristics.

Because many early environmental education activities involve living things and learning through concrete, firsthand experiences, it is important to recognize differences in families regarding attitudes toward their child's handling certain insects or creatures and their reverence toward some animals or plants in nature. Rice, beans, and corn or maize are revered in some cultures. Some religions fear snakes and others use snakes in worship.

- Ask for volunteers to share their illustration or describe some of their conversation about accommodating family culture.
- Transition to the next key characteristic and ask that group, Key Characteristic #2, to report out.
- Display the PowerPoint slide, as appropriate.
- Highlight key points from the group presentation and any other key take aways from Key Characteristic #2.
- Transition to the next key characteristic and ask that group, Key Characteristic #3, to report out.
- Display the PowerPoint slide, as appropriate.
- Highlight key points from the group presentation and any other key take aways from Key Characteristic #3.

Optional Activity: Outdoor Play

10 minutes

- Explain that play is an essential part of early childhood education.
- Ask them to jot down some of the benefits of outdoor play.
- After a minute or two, ask 2-3 participants to share their ideas.
- Then, ask them to think about how play is facilitated. As adults, what are some ways you can create opportunities for play, especially play with natural objects and play in the outdoors? Ask them to jot down one or two ideas.
- Display the Activity 4 "Outdoor Play" which includes three photos of children engaged in outdoor play.
- Explain that exploration in the outdoors can be seen as messy and dirty and potentially dangerous. Imagine that some of the parents on your advisory board resist the idea of taking children outside to play.
- Using Activity 4 "Outdoor Play" and "sticky notes," ask participants to make a list of the barriers parents might express.
- After a couple of minutes, ask them to describe ways of reducing or eliminating those barriers or risks. Ask them to be as specific as possible.



- Wrap up: Display pages 25-29 of the *Early Childhood EE Guidelines* on your screen and provide short summary. Point out the two guidelines as well as the boxes that discuss issues such as outdoor play for infants and toddlers as well the role of adults in outdoor play.
- Ask the next two groups present Key Characteristic #4 and Key Characteristic #5.
- After each presentation, stress key points on each or clarify information after each group has presented.

Optional Activity: Designing Outdoor Learning Spaces

20 minutes

- Explain that they will be digging into Key Characteristic #5 a bit more.
- Explain that outdoor spaces come in a variety shapes and sizes. Some are well developed for outdoor learning and play and some are not.
- Remind them that the Guidelines talk about safety, use of natural components, maintenance, and how spaces and places can enhance development.
- Explain that they will be working in small groups. They will be asked to think about how they might improve an undeveloped outdoor space.
- Post the URL for the Activity 5 “Designing Outdoor Learning Spaces” in the chat box and ask participants to copy this URL into their browsers.
- Post the URL for the Early Childhood EE Guidelines in the chat box and ask participants to copy this URL into their browsers. They may want to refer to Key Characteristic #5 (starting on p. 45) during this activity.
- Explain that in their small groups they will examine two photos of outdoor spaces. Ask them to follow the directions. They will have 15 minutes.

1. Look at the two pictures. Each illustrates an undeveloped outdoor space that could benefit from improvements.

2. Select one and discuss how it could be improved to provide opportunities for outdoor learning and play.
3. Sketch or describe the improvements that could be made to the selected outdoor learning space.



- Bring the group back together after about 15 minutes.
- Wrap up: Ask if anyone would like to share their sketches or provide a quick review of their discussions? Anything surprise them? What were some commonalities across groups?
- Finally, ask the group that investigated Key Characteristic #6 to present. After the presentation, stress key points or clarify information after each group has presented.

Wrap-Up, Final Questions & Evaluation

10 minutes

This final session provides an opportunity for participants to reflect, ask questions, and complete the workshop evaluation.

Procedure:

- Final reflection: Ask participants: 1) What two things are you going to take back to your organization?
- Open the floor for any final questions.
- Thank the participants for their time.
- Post the URL to the Google Form: *Guidelines Virtual Workshop Evaluation* in the chat. Ask participants to take a few minutes to complete the evaluation.