

# The Early Learning Goals

## What are the Early Learning Goals and Why Do they Matter?

For early years practitioners, it is important to be aware of the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) and understand how they are used to assess a child's learning and development as they approach the end of their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). When a child reaches the end of their reception year, usually in the final term of the academic year in which they turn five years old, their teacher or early years practitioner is responsible for completing the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. The EYFS Profile is a statutory assessment that looks at the child's development across seventeen ELGs, covering all seven areas of learning in the EYFS framework. The ELGs describe the knowledge, skills and understanding that children are expected to demonstrate by the end of their Reception year. Each ELG is listed in Annex D of the EYFS statutory framework for childminders. For every ELG, practitioners assess whether a child is working at the expected level for their age or is still emerging.

The EYFS Profile is designed to give parents/carers, practitioners, and teachers, a clear and accurate picture of a child's development, and to support a smooth transition into Year One. A child is said to have reached a Good Level of Development (GLD) if they achieve the expected level in the prime areas - Communication and Language, Personal, Social and Emotional development, and Physical Development - as well as in Literacy and Mathematics. While reception teachers usually complete the profile, the responsibility may fall to an early years practitioner in certain circumstances, such as when a child has deferred starting school and will go straight into Year One.

## The Early Learning Goals in Practice

The ELGs are not intended to be used by practitioners to plan their curriculum, as doing so would reduce opportunities for children to access a wide variety of rich learning experiences. When planning the curriculum, practitioners should have high expectations for all children and consider each child's individual interests, strengths, stage of development, and any additional needs, recognising that every child is unique. The EYFS framework does not prescribe a specific teaching approach; instead, it allows practitioners the flexibility to use their professional judgement and knowledge of

each child to plan engaging, stimulating, and appropriately challenging activities across all areas of learning and development. For support, practitioners may choose to use the non-statutory guidance documents, *Development Matters* and *Birth to Five Matters*, to inform their planning.

The ELGs are also not meant to be used to track a child's learning throughout the year or to guide ongoing assessment. Instead, they are used as part of the EYFS Profile to show what children have achieved by the end of their Reception year.

In children's early years, the prime areas of learning are prioritised to build strong foundations for development, particularly for children under three. As children grow, the prime areas remain central, while the specific areas of learning - Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the world, and Expressive Arts and Design - develop naturally as they make sense of their experiences and the world around them. By the time children enter their Reception year, there should be a greater focus on teaching the essential skills and knowledge within the specific areas of learning to support their preparation for the transition into Year One.

To give an example of how to support children within a specific area of learning, when considering Understanding the World, young children can be supported through a range of meaningful, play-based and first-hand experiences. These may include regular outings to the local community, such as visits to the park, library, shops or the post box, which help children to develop an understanding of their immediate environment. This learning can be extended through discussion during circle time, role play and exploring maps within the setting. For example, practitioners could create role play areas such as a shop, post office, place of worship or travel agents, allowing children to act out real-life experiences. They could also provide small world resources, including figures, buildings, and vehicles, enabling children to explore their community and environment. By encouraging children to design and share their own simple maps of the setting or local area, practitioners can support their understanding of place and space.

In addition, practitioners can support children in recognising similarities and differences between communities in this country and in other countries through sharing stories and non-fiction texts that reflect different cultures, religions, and ways of life. Children can be encouraged to bring in photographs or objects from home that represent their family life or culture, helping to value their individual experiences. Practitioners can further support learning by sharing traditional stories and music from different cultures, as well as photos or videos of homes, schools, transport, places of worship, and landmarks from countries that children cannot visit in person. Children can also be encouraged to

talk about these similarities and differences using prompts such as “What is the same?” and “What is different?”. Celebrating a range of cultural and religious events throughout the year, such as Diwali, Eid, Christmas, and Chinese New Year, and involving families in sharing traditions, further supports children to develop awareness, respect, and understanding of the wider world.

Through tailoring these experiences to each child’s individual interests, needs and abilities, practitioners are already supporting them in working towards achieving the Understanding the World – *People, Culture and Communities* ELG by the end of their reception year.

### **Assessing the Early Learning Goals in the EYFS Profile**

When assessing the Early Learning Goals, practitioners should make a holistic, best-fit judgement based on their everyday observations and interactions with the child. This is enough to understand the child’s development in relation to the ELGs. Whilst it is considered good practice for practitioners to write notes and collect photographic evidence where it is beneficial, recording observations is not a requirement.

Professional judgement and knowledge of the child are enough to make an accurate assessment. Practitioners should ask themselves: “*Have I seen the child do or show understanding of this without support?*” This approach ensures that assessment does not take time away from working with and supporting the child. For each ELG, practitioners must indicate whether a child is working at the expected level for their age or their skills and understanding are still emerging.

As mentioned earlier, the EYFS Profile is statutory, so it **must** be completed in the final term of the year when the child turns five. In some exceptional cases, it can be done in the final term before the child moves into Year One if they are staying in EYFS beyond age five. Once completed it must be submitted to the local authority by 30th June, and a copy should be given to the child’s Year One teacher.

Where the EYFS Profile is to be completed for a child who has remained in registered early years provision, early years practitioners may choose to include a short paragraph on the child’s skills and abilities in relation to the three characteristics of effective teaching and learning - playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and thinking critically. This information can support discussions with the child’s Year One teacher about their stage of development and learning needs and help to inform the planning of activities in Year One.

If a child goes to more than one setting, the profile should be completed by the provider where the child spends the most time between 8am and 6pm. Usually, this will be the reception class in a school or a specialist provision.

### **Assessing the ELGs for Children with Additional Needs**

The EYFS Profile needs to be completed for all children, including those with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Practitioners should make reasonable adjustments to the assessment process where needed. This may mean the practitioner will need to consider requesting support from a specialist. Children will often show different levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities across the ELGs, so it is important to fully assess all areas of their development. This helps to ensure that future learning activities are planned effectively and any additional support a child may need is put in place.

### **Assessing the ELGs for Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL)**

Providers need to make sure that children have plenty of opportunities to learn English and develop their skills, so they are ready for Year One. When it comes to assessing communication, language, and literacy, practitioners should focus on the child's abilities in English.

If a child isn't yet confident in English, it is important to talk with parents/carers about the child's skills in their home language. This helps to determine whether there is any reason to be concerned about a possible language delay.

### **Final Thoughts**

In summary, the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) outline the knowledge, skills, and development children are expected to demonstrate by the end of their Reception year. While they form part of the statutory EYFS Profile, they are not a curriculum or planning tool. Practitioners should focus on providing a broad, rich, and engaging learning environment that reflects each child's interests, strengths, and individual needs. Early years practitioners already support the ELGs every day. Through warm relationships, responsive interactions, play, routines, and real-life experiences, children are developing exactly as the EYFS intends. By recognising and valuing each child as an individual, practitioners help all children work towards achieving a Good Level of Development. Effective assessment of the ELGs relies on professional judgement and ongoing observation, rather than formal evidence collection. The ELGs are not about pushing children forward - they are about recognising how far children have come and preparing them for a smooth transition into Year One.

## About Us.

**Childminding UK** has been supporting childminders for over 30 years. Formed in 1991 by and for working childminders in Northamptonshire, we now support childminders across the country. A registered charity, (Charity Number 1182575) we are the only national organisation that solely supports childminders and the only early years organisation that has achieved the Princess Royal Training Award for 'Ensuring high quality childcare through training and support'. All staff are experienced childcare professionals and have also been childminders themselves and our trustees are working childminders or have knowledge of childminding, so we have an excellent understanding of the sector.

To find out more about Childminding UK or to get in touch, please call us on 01536 210685 or email [info@childmindinguk.com](mailto:info@childmindinguk.com), or visit our website - [childmindinguk.com](http://childmindinguk.com)