



MODULE

3

Understanding How Young Children Grow and Develop

ESTIMATED STUDY TIME: 4 HOURS



Learn
with purpose



Apply in
real life



Keep children
safe



Grow with
confidence



Become
work-ready

Suggested Study Plan

Session 1 (60 minutes)

- Lesson 1: Understanding Child Development
- Activity

Session 2 (60 minutes)

- Lesson 2: Babies (Birth to 12 Months)

Session 3 (60 minutes)

- Lesson 3: Young Toddlers (1 to 2 Years)
- Lesson 4: Older Toddlers (2 to 3 Years)

Session 4 (60 minutes)

- Lesson 5: Young Children (3 to 4 Years)
- Lesson 6: Observing Children's Development
- Knowledge Check
- End-of-Module Assessment

"Every child develops at their own pace. Our role is to encourage, support and celebrate every step."

Why This Module Matters

Every child is unique.

Children grow, learn and develop from the day they are born. Some children learn new skills quickly, while others need more time. This is a normal part of development.

As an ECD Assistant, understanding child development helps you respond to children's needs with confidence and care. It also helps you provide the right support at the right time and recognise when a child may need additional help from the ECD Practitioner or another professional.

This module will introduce you to the different areas of child development and help you understand what children are usually learning during the early years.

Remember, developmental milestones are guides. They help us understand children's development, but they are not tests that children must pass. By completing this module, you will develop a deeper understanding of how young children grow, learn and change during the early years. This knowledge will help you respond to children's needs with confidence, celebrate their progress and recognise when they may need additional support.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Explain what child development means.
- Describe the five areas of child development.
- Recognise typical developmental milestones from birth to four years.
- Explain that every child develops at their own pace.
- Describe simple ways to support children's development.
- Observe children's learning respectfully.
- Share concerns appropriately with the ECD Practitioner



Lesson 1

Understanding Child Development

Why This Lesson Matters

Every day, children are learning something new.

Understanding how children grow and develop will help you respond to their needs, encourage their learning and recognise their achievements.

It will also help you appreciate that every child follows their own unique path of development.

What Is Child Development?

Child development is the process through which children grow, learn and gain new skills over time.

Development begins before birth and continues throughout life.

During the early years, children develop more rapidly than at any other stage of life. They learn to move, communicate, think, solve problems, build relationships and become more independent.

As an ECD Assistant, you will have the privilege of watching children achieve many important milestones.



REMEMBER

Development is a journey.

Every child develops at their own pace.

Avoid comparing one child with another.

The Five Areas of Development

Although we often describe development in different areas, they all work together.

Physical Development

This includes:

- growing stronger
- learning to roll, crawl, walk and run
- developing balance and coordination
- using hands and fingers to explore and create

Cognitive Development

This is how children learn to think and understand.

Children learn to:

- solve problems
- remember information
- recognise patterns
- explore their environment
- understand cause and effect.

Language Development

Children learn to communicate by:

- listening
- understanding words
- making sounds
- speaking
- singing
- sharing ideas.

Language grows through everyday conversations.

Social Development

Children learn to:

- build friendships
- share
- cooperate
- take turns
- understand other people's feelings.

These skills develop through relationships and play.

Emotional Development

Children learn to:

- recognise feelings
- express emotions
- develop confidence
- manage disappointment
- feel secure with trusted adults.

Warm, caring relationships are essential for healthy emotional development.



IN PRACTICE

At Siyakhula ECD Centre, Thandi watches three-year-old Amina and her friends build a road for their toy cars using blocks.

While they play, the children are learning in many different ways.

They are:

- using their hands to build (physical development)
- solving problems together (cognitive development)
- talking about their ideas (language development)
- sharing materials (social development)
- feeling proud when their road is finished (emotional development).

One activity supports many areas of development at the same time

Every Child Is Unique

Children do not all learn new skills on the same day or at the same age.

Some children begin walking earlier than others.

Some begin talking later.

Some are naturally outgoing.

Others are quieter and like to observe before joining an activity.

These differences are a normal part of development.

What matters most is that children continue to grow, learn and develop over time.

Remember that development is influenced by many factors, including health, nutrition, relationships, opportunities to play and each child's individual strengths.

Your role is to encourage progress rather than expect every child to develop in exactly the same way.



SAFETY FIRST

Children explore the world through movement and curiosity.

As children become more active, they also need careful supervision.

A safe environment allows children to explore, learn and develop with confidence.

Activity 1

Looking Beyond the Milestone

Read each statement.

Decide whether it is **True** or **False**.

1. Every child develops at exactly the same pace.
2. Developmental milestones are helpful guides.
3. Children can develop in several areas at the same time.
4. Comparing children helps them learn faster.
5. Warm, caring relationships support healthy development

Suggested Response

1. False
2. True
3. True
4. False
5. True



READY FOR WORK

Observe children with curiosity, not judgement.

Celebrate every achievement, no matter how small. Your encouragement helps children develop confidence and a love of learning.

Key Idea

Every child is unique.

Your role is not to compare children or diagnose difficulties.

Your role is to encourage learning, celebrate progress, observe carefully and share any concerns with the ECD Practitioner.

Looking Ahead

In the next lesson you will learn about babies from birth to 12 months.

You will discover how babies learn through loving relationships, responsive care, movement, play and everyday interactions, and how you can support their healthy development.

Lesson 2

Babies (Birth to 12 Months)

Why This Lesson Matters

The first year of life is a time of remarkable growth and development.

Babies change quickly during these early months. Every day they are learning to move, communicate, recognise familiar people and explore the world around them. As an ECD Assistant, understanding how babies develop will help you respond to their needs with confidence, patience and care.

Remember, babies learn best when they feel safe, loved and secure.

Getting to Know Babies

Babies depend on caring adults for everything.

They need adults who respond to their cries, comfort them, talk to them, feed them, play with them and keep them safe.

These everyday interactions help babies develop physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually.

Even very young babies are learning all the time.



REMEMBER

Every cuddle, smile, conversation and gentle touch helps a baby's brain grow and develop.

What Babies Are Usually Learning

During the first year, babies often begin to:

Physical Development

- lift their heads
- roll over
- sit with support and later independently
- crawl or move around
- pull themselves up
- begin standing or taking first steps
- reach for and hold toys

Cognitive Development

Babies begin to:

- recognise familiar people
- explore objects with their hands and mouths
- understand that actions have results
- become curious about the world around them
- look for hidden objects

Language Development

Babies begin to:

- respond to familiar voices
- smile when spoken to
- make sounds
- babble
- respond to their names
- understand simple words
- say their first meaningful words

Social Development

Babies begin to:

- smile at familiar people
- enjoy simple games
- show interest in other children
- copy facial expressions
- enjoy playing with trusted adults

Emotional Development

Babies begin to:

- form strong attachments to familiar adults
- express happiness, excitement and frustration
- seek comfort when upset
- show preferences for familiar people and routines



IN PRACTICE

At Siyakhula ECD Centre, six-month-old Lindiwe is lying on a clean blanket during tummy time.

Thandi places a colourful rattle just beyond her reach.

Lindiwe stretches, rolls onto her side and finally reaches the toy.

Thandi smiles and says,

"You worked so hard to reach it!"

Although this looks like simple play, Lindiwe is developing strength, coordination, problem-solving skills and confidence

How You Can Support Babies

You do not need expensive equipment to support babies' development.

Simple, loving interactions make the biggest difference.

You can:

- talk to babies throughout the day
- smile and make eye contact
- sing songs and nursery rhymes
- read simple picture books
- give babies time to move and explore safely
- offer age-appropriate toys made from safe materials
- respond quickly when babies need comfort
- provide predictable daily routines.

Every interaction helps babies learn.

Babies learn best through loving, responsive relationships. Everyday routines such as feeding, changing nappies and comforting a baby are valuable opportunities for learning and connection



SAFETY FIRST

Babies explore with their hands and mouths. Always check that toys and materials are:

- clean
- too large to be swallowed
- not broken
- free from sharp edges.

Never leave a baby unattended on a changing surface, bed, table or other raised area.

Always follow your ECD centre's safe sleeping and supervision procedures

Development Snapshot

Meet Lindiwe

Age: 6 months

You might notice that Lindiwe:

- rolls from her back onto her tummy
- reaches for toys
- laughs during play
- enjoys looking at faces
- responds when someone calls her name
- enjoys listening to songs

Observe

Every baby develops differently.

If you notice that Lindiwe is losing skills she previously had, seems unresponsive, or you have concerns about her development, share your observations with the ECD Practitioner.

How You Can Support Lindiwe

- Talk to her throughout the day.
- Give her time to move safely on the floor.
- Read simple picture books.
- Sing songs together.
- Smile, laugh and respond when she communicates.

Activity 2

Supporting a Baby's Learning?

Match each activity with the area of development it mainly supports

Activity

Possible Answer

Singing a nursery rhyme.

Giving a baby tummy time.

Smiling and talking to a baby.

Playing peek-a-boo.

Offering a safe toy to hold.

Suggested responses

Singing a nursery rhyme - *Language Development*

Giving a baby tummy time - *Physical Development*

Smiling and talking to a baby - *Emotional and Language Development*

Playing peek-a-boo - *Cognitive Development*

Offering a safe toy to hold - *Physical Development*



READY FOR WORK

Babies cannot tell you what they need with words.

Watch carefully, respond kindly and be patient.

The way you respond helps babies feel safe and builds trusting relationships

Key Idea

Babies learn through loving relationships, responsive care and opportunities to explore.

Your calm, caring and consistent interactions help build a strong foundation for healthy growth and development.

Looking Ahead

In the next lesson you will meet young toddlers between one and two years of age. You will discover how curiosity, movement and growing independence help toddlers learn about themselves and the world around them.

Lesson 3

Young Toddlers (1 to 2 Years)

Why This Lesson Matters

Between the ages of one and two years, children become eager explorers. They are learning to walk, talk, solve simple problems and do more things for themselves. They are curious about everything around them and learn best by exploring their environment with caring adults close by.

As an ECD Assistant, you play an important role in creating a safe environment where toddlers can explore, learn and develop with confidence.

Getting to Know Young Toddlers

Young toddlers are becoming more independent every day. They enjoy trying new things and often want to do tasks by themselves. Sometimes they become frustrated when they cannot do something on their own. This is a normal part of learning.

Your patience, encouragement and gentle guidance help toddlers develop confidence while learning new skills.

Learning often involves trial and error. Allow toddlers time to practise new skills and celebrate their efforts, even when they do not succeed the first time.



REMEMBER

Toddlers learn by doing.
Give them opportunities to explore, practise and try again.

What Young Toddlers Are Usually Learning

Physical Development

Young toddlers often begin to:

- walk confidently
- climb onto low furniture
- push and pull toys
- kick or throw a ball
- feed themselves with a spoon
- build small towers with blocks

Cognitive Development

Young toddlers begin to:

- solve simple problems
- copy what adults do
- match familiar objects
- understand simple instructions
- explore how things work

Language Development

Young toddlers often:

- use more words every month
- begin putting two words together
- point to familiar objects when asked
- enjoy songs and simple stories
- follow simple instructions

Social Development

Young toddlers begin to:

- play alongside other children
- copy other children's actions
- enjoy simple group activities
- show affection to familiar adults
- begin learning to take turns with support

Emotional Development

Young toddlers often:

- show excitement and curiosity
- express strong feelings
- seek comfort from trusted adults
- become proud when they learn a new skill
- begin developing confidence and independence



IN PRACTICE

At Siyakhula ECD Centre, eighteen-month-old Kabelo wants to pour his own drinking water.

He tips the cup too quickly and some water spills onto the table.

Instead of saying, "Let me do it," Thandi smiles and says,

"You are learning. Let us try again together."

This time Kabelo pours more slowly.

He smiles proudly when he succeeds.

By giving Kabelo another opportunity to try, Thandi is helping him develop confidence, coordination and independence.

How You Can Support Young Toddlers

Young toddlers need opportunities to move, explore and make simple choices.

You can support them by:

- talking with them throughout the day
- naming objects and actions
- reading short picture books
- singing songs with actions
- encouraging climbing, walking and movement in safe spaces
- offering simple puzzles and blocks
- allowing children to feed themselves when appropriate
- praising effort rather than only success.

Children gain confidence when adults notice their effort, not only the final result.
Children learn best when they feel encouraged.



SAFETY FIRST

Toddlers are curious and move quickly.

Always supervise them carefully.

Pay particular attention to:

- gates and doors
- outdoor play equipment
- steps and uneven surfaces
- small objects that could be swallowed
- hot drinks and hot food
- water containers and buckets.

Careful supervision allows toddlers to explore safely.

Development Snapshot

Meet Kabelo

Age: 18 months

You might notice that Kabelo:

- walks confidently
- enjoys climbing
- says several simple words
- follows simple instructions
- likes looking at books
- enjoys copying adults
- wants to do things for himself.

Observe

Every toddler develops differently.

If you notice that Kabelo has stopped using skills he previously had, rarely responds to people around him, or you have concerns about his development, share your observations with the ECD Practitioner

How You Can Support Kabelo

- Give him time to practise new skills.
- Talk with him during everyday routines.
- Read simple stories together.
- Encourage active play.
- Celebrate his efforts and achievements.

Activity 3

What Is the Toddler Learning?

Read each situation.

Write one area of development that the child is strengthening.

Situation 1

A toddler stacks four blocks to build a tower.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Physical development and cognitive development.

Situation 2

A toddler points to a picture of a dog and says, "Dog!"

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Language development.

Situation 3

A toddler tries to put on their own shoes.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Physical development, emotional development and independence.

Situation 4

A toddler laughs while chasing bubbles with other children.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Physical development, social development and emotional development.



READY FOR WORK

When toddlers are learning a new skill, give them enough time to try before stepping in to help.

Encouragement builds confidence.

Patience helps children become independent

Key Idea

Young toddlers are curious, active and eager to learn.

By providing a safe environment, encouraging independence and responding with patience and kindness, you help toddlers develop the confidence and skills they need for the next stage of their learning journey.

Looking Ahead

In the next lesson you will learn about older toddlers between two and three years of age.

You will discover how their language, imagination, friendships and problem-solving skills continue to grow through play and everyday experiences.

Lesson 4

Older Toddlers (2 to 3 Years)

Why This Lesson Matters

Between the ages of two and three years, children become more confident, more independent and more interested in the people and world around them.

They ask questions, enjoy pretend play, develop friendships and begin solving more complex problems.

As an ECD Assistant, you help create an environment where older toddlers can explore, communicate, make choices and learn through play.

Getting to Know Older Toddlers

Older toddlers are becoming more independent.

They enjoy making choices and often want to do things without help.

Their language develops rapidly, allowing them to express their ideas, ask questions and communicate their feelings more clearly.

This is also a time when children begin learning important social skills such as sharing, taking turns and working with others.



REMEMBER

Older toddlers are learning through every conversation, every game and every new experience.

Your encouragement helps build confidence and curiosity

What Older Toddlers Are Usually Learning

Physical Development

Older toddlers often:

- run with confidence
- jump with both feet
- climb safely with supervision
- kick and throw a ball with more control
- use crayons, paintbrushes and simple scissors with support
- begin dressing themselves with some assistance

Cognitive Development

Older toddlers begin to:

- solve simple puzzles
- remember familiar routines
- sort objects by colour or shape
- count during play
- use their imagination in pretend play
- ask many questions about the world around them

Language Development

Older toddlers often:

- speak in short sentences
- ask questions
- enjoy listening to longer stories
- sing familiar songs
- learn many new words each day
- follow two-step instructions

Social Development

Older toddlers begin to:

- enjoy playing with other children
- take turns with support
- cooperate during simple games
- develop friendships
- show kindness and empathy

Emotional Development

Older toddlers often:

- express a wider range of emotions
- become proud of their achievements
- learn to wait for short periods
- begin managing frustration with support
- develop growing confidence



IN PRACTICE

At Siyakhula ECD Centre, two-and-a-half-year-old Aisha and her friends decide to turn the block corner into a veterinary clinic.

One child pretends to be the veterinarian, another is the pet owner and Aisha carefully wraps a toy puppy in a blanket.

As they play, Thandi listens to their conversations and asks,

"What happened to the puppy?"

The children eagerly explain their ideas.

Without taking over the game, Thandi introduces new words such as "examine," "gentle" and "healthy."

The children continue playing while developing language, imagination, problem-solving skills and cooperation

How You Can Support Older Toddlers

You can encourage learning by:

- asking open-ended questions
- reading stories every day
- providing opportunities for pretend play
- encouraging drawing, painting and building
- giving children simple choices
- singing songs and rhymes
- encouraging children to solve simple problems
- recognising effort as well as achievement.

Play remains one of the most powerful ways young children learn.

Older toddlers enjoy solving problems and making choices. Giving them opportunities to think for themselves helps develop confidence and independence



SAFETY FIRST

As children become more confident, they may also take more risks.

Continue to supervise children closely, especially during:

- climbing activities
- outdoor play
- water play
- toileting
- transitions between activities.

Children need opportunities to explore, but they also depend on adults to keep them safe.

Development Snapshot

Meet Aisha

Age: 2½ Years Old

You might notice that Aisha:

- enjoys pretending and using her imagination
- speaks in short sentences
- asks many questions
- likes playing with other children
- enjoys looking at books
- is learning to take turns
- wants to do many things by herself

How You Can Support Aisha

- Encourage pretend play.
- Read stories and ask questions about them.
- Provide opportunities for art and construction play.
- Encourage conversations throughout the day.
- Praise effort and celebrate progress

Observe

Every child develops differently.

If you notice that Aisha has stopped using skills she previously had, has great difficulty communicating, avoids interaction with others or you have concerns about her development, discuss your observations with the ECD Practitioner.

What This Means in Practice

Older toddlers enjoy making choices and solving problems.

As an ECD Assistant, avoid doing everything for children.

Instead, encourage them to think, try different ideas and celebrate their efforts.

Learning happens when children are actively involved.

Activity 4

Learning Through Play

Read each situation.

Identify one area of development that is being supported.

Situation 1

Children are pretending to cook a meal together.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Language development, social development and cognitive development.

Situation 2

A child completes a simple puzzle without help.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Cognitive development and emotional development.

Situation 3

Two children work together to build a tower with blocks.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Social development, cognitive development and language development.

Situation 4

A child listens carefully to a story and answers simple questions.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Language development and cognitive development.



READY FOR WORK

Children learn more when adults join their play without taking over.

Ask questions.

Listen carefully.

Encourage children's ideas.

Support their learning through play

Key Idea

Older toddlers are becoming confident learners who enjoy exploring, talking, pretending and making friends.

By creating rich opportunities for play and conversation, you help children develop the skills they need for the preschool years

Looking Ahead

In the next lesson you will explore the development of children between three and four years of age.

You will discover how growing independence, imagination and curiosity prepare young children for the next stage of their learning journey.

Lesson 5

Young Children (3 to 4 Years)

Why This Lesson Matters

Between the ages of three and four years, children become more confident, independent and eager to learn.

They enjoy asking questions, solving problems, making friends and exploring new ideas through play.

As an ECD Assistant, you help create learning experiences that build children's confidence, curiosity and readiness for the next stage of their development.

Getting to Know Young Children

Children between three and four years are becoming more independent in many parts of their daily lives.

They enjoy helping with simple responsibilities, making choices and completing tasks on their own.

Their imagination becomes richer, their conversations become longer and they begin to understand more about the world around them.

Although many children of this age are preparing for Grade R, every child develops at their own pace.

Our role is to support each child to continue growing with confidence.

Children of this age enjoy meaningful responsibilities. Simple classroom jobs help them develop independence, confidence and a sense of belonging.



REMEMBER

Children learn best when they are encouraged to explore, ask questions and try new things.

What Young Children Are Usually Learning

Physical Development

Young children often:

- run, jump and climb with confidence
- balance on one foot for a short time
- catch and throw larger balls
- use crayons, paintbrushes and scissors with greater control
- dress themselves with less assistance

Cognitive Development

Young children begin to:

- solve more complex problems
- recognise numbers, colours and shapes
- notice patterns
- remember stories and routines
- ask "why" and "how" questions
- plan simple pretend play with friends

Language Development

Young children often:

- speak in longer sentences
- tell simple stories
- ask many questions
- enjoy conversations
- recognise familiar songs and rhymes
- learn many new words every day

Social Development

Young children begin to:

- cooperate during group activities
- negotiate and solve simple disagreements
- develop close friendships
- enjoy helping others
- understand simple rules and routines

Emotional Development

Young children often:

- become more confident
- recognise their own feelings
- begin understanding the feelings of others
- show pride in their achievements
- recover more easily from disappointment with adult support



IN PRACTICE

At Siyakhula ECD Centre, the children decide to build a small "community" using blocks, boxes and recycled materials.

One group builds houses.

Another group creates roads.

A third group makes a clinic.

Thandi walks around the room asking questions such as,

"Who lives in this house?"

"How will people get to the clinic?"

"What else does your community need?"

The children eagerly share their ideas, solve problems together and add new buildings.

Through one activity they are developing language, creativity, cooperation, early mathematical thinking and problem-solving skills

How You Can Support Young Children

Children between three and four years enjoy learning through meaningful experiences.

You can support them by:

- reading stories every day
- asking open-ended questions
- encouraging conversations
- providing opportunities for creative play
- offering puzzles and construction activities
- encouraging children to solve problems together
- giving children simple responsibilities, such as helping to tidy the classroom
- celebrating effort, persistence and kindness.

Learning should be enjoyable, active and connected to children's everyday experiences. Rich conversations, imaginative play and opportunities to solve problems together help prepare children for lifelong learning



SAFETY FIRST

As children become more confident, they may overestimate what they can do.

Continue to supervise children during:

- climbing activities
- outdoor play
- water play
- excursions
- toileting
- arrival and departure times.

Children become more independent, but they still need attentive adults to keep them safe.

Development Snapshot

Meet Amina

Age: 3 years and 8 months

You might notice that Amina:

- speaks confidently in sentences
- enjoys telling stories
- asks many questions
- enjoys drawing people and familiar places
- plays cooperatively with friends
- likes helping with classroom routines
- enjoys solving simple problems

How You Can Support Aisha

- Encourage her curiosity by answering questions and asking questions in return.
- Read stories together every day.
- Provide opportunities for imaginative play.
- Encourage group activities where children work together.
- Celebrate her ideas, effort and creativity

Observe

Every child develops differently.

If you notice that Amina has stopped using skills she previously had, has difficulty communicating with others, struggles to participate in everyday activities or you have concerns about her development, discuss your observations with the ECD Practitioner.

What This Means in Practice

Young children enjoy being trusted with simple responsibilities.

As an ECD Assistant, encourage children to help set up activities, tidy learning areas, care for books and resources, and work together with their friends.

These everyday responsibilities help children develop confidence, independence and a sense of belonging.

Activity 4

Growing Everyday

Read each situation.

Identify one area of development that is being supported.

Situation 1

Children work together to build a bridge using blocks.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Cognitive development, social development and language development.

Situation 2

A child tells the group about a visit to their grandmother.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Language development and emotional development.

Situation 3

A child carefully cuts out shapes for an art activity.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Physical development, particularly fine motor skills.

Situation 4

Two children work together to solve a disagreement about whose turn it is.

Area of Development

Suggested Response

Social development and emotional development.



READY FOR WORK

Ask children questions that encourage them to think.

Instead of asking questions that have only one correct answer, try asking:

"What do you think will happen next?"

"How could we solve this problem together?"

These conversations help children develop confidence, language and problem-solving skills.

Key Idea

Children between three and four years are becoming confident, capable learners.

By providing rich opportunities for play, conversation, creativity and problem-solving, you help prepare children not only for Grade R, but for lifelong learning.

Looking Ahead

In the final lesson of this module, you will learn how to observe children's development respectfully and professionally.

You will discover how careful observation helps the ECD team celebrate children's progress, plan meaningful learning experiences and identify when a child may need additional support.

Lesson 6

Observing Children's Development

Why This Lesson Matters

Every child is unique.

By observing children during everyday activities, ECD professionals learn about each child's strengths, interests, progress and individual needs.

Observation helps us understand children better. It is not about judging children or comparing them with others.

As an ECD Assistant, your observations are an important contribution to the work of the ECD team.

What Is Observation?

Observation means watching, listening and noticing what children do during their everyday activities.

You might observe children while they are:

- playing
- talking with friends
- listening to a story
- drawing or painting
- eating meals
- exploring outdoors
- solving problems
- joining group activities.

Children often show us what they know and can do through their play.



REMEMBER

Observe with curiosity.

Notice what children can do before focusing on what they cannot yet do

Why Is Observation Important?

Observation helps the ECD team to:

- understand each child's development
- recognise children's interests
- plan meaningful learning experiences
- celebrate children's achievements
- identify when a child may need additional support
- communicate more effectively with families.

Observation helps us support children as individuals.

Observation helps us see children's strengths before focusing on their challenges. A strength-based approach builds confidence while helping us identify the best ways to support each child's learning.

What Should You Observe?

During the day you may notice:

- how children move
- how they communicate
- how they solve problems
- how they play with others
- how they respond to routines
- what they enjoy doing
- how they express their feelings.

Small observations often provide valuable information.



IN PRACTICE

At Siyakhula ECD Centre, Thandi notices that Amina chooses books every morning and enjoys telling stories to her friends.

Later, Thandi shares her observations with Nomsa.

Together they decide to include more storytelling opportunities in the weekly programme and encourage Amina to help tell stories during group time.

By observing Amina's interests, the team is able to build on her strengths and create meaningful learning experiences

When Should You Share Your Observations?

Always share important observations with the ECD Practitioner.

For example, if you notice that a child:

- has stopped using skills they previously had
- seems unusually withdrawn over several days
- has difficulty seeing, hearing or moving
- struggles to communicate compared with their usual behaviour
- appears unwell or unusually tired
- shows changes in behaviour that concern you.

Sharing observations does not mean making a diagnosis.

It means ensuring that the child receives the support they may need.

Remember that your role is to observe carefully and report your observations. Decisions about assessment or referral remain the responsibility of the ECD Practitioner and other appropriate professionals.



SAFETY FIRST

If your observation relates to a child's immediate safety or wellbeing, inform the ECD Practitioner immediately.

Never delay reporting concerns that could place a child at risk

Activity 6

What Do You Notice?

Read each situation. Write one observation and one action you would take.

Situation 1

Lebo, who usually enjoys outdoor play, has spent the last three mornings sitting quietly by himself.

My Observation

My Action

Suggested Response

Observation: Lebo's behaviour has changed over several days.

Action: Share your observations with the ECD Practitioner and continue offering encouragement and support

Situation 2

Naledi proudly shows you that she can now button her own jersey.

My Observation

My Action

Suggested Response

Observation: Naledi has developed greater independence.

Action: Praise her effort and encourage her to continue practising

Situation 3

Sipho has become very interested in insects and spends time watching ants in the playground.

My Observation

My Action

Suggested Response

Observation: Sipho has a strong interest in nature.

Action: Share the observation with the ECD Practitioner so that future learning experiences can build on his interests.



READY FOR WORK

Observe. Encourage. Support. Share.

These four simple actions will guide your work every day

Key Idea

Observation is one of the most valuable tools in Early Childhood Development.

By noticing children's strengths, interests and progress, you help create learning experiences that support every child to grow with confidence.

Looking Ahead

You have now completed all the lessons in Module 3.

Next, you will review what you have learned before moving on to Module 4, where you will discover how to support children's learning through play, stories, music, art and everyday experiences.

MODULE 3 SUMMARY

Congratulations on completing Module 3. You have developed a deeper understanding of how young children grow, learn and develop during the early years. This knowledge will help you recognise children's strengths, support their learning and respond confidently to their changing needs as an ECD Assistant.

In this module you explored how young children grow and develop from birth to four years of age.

You learned that every child develops at their own pace and that development includes physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional growth.

You also discovered practical ways to support children at different ages and learned how careful observation helps the ECD team respond to each child's strengths, interests and needs.

Most importantly, you learned that your role is to observe with care, encourage every child and share important observations with the ECD Practitioner.

Key Messages

As you prepare to move on, remember these important ideas.

- Every child is unique.
- Children develop at their own pace.
- Developmental milestones are guides, not tests.
- Children learn through play, relationships and everyday experiences.
- Observation helps us understand children better.
- Celebrate children's strengths and encourage their progress.

Share concerns with the ECD Practitioner when needed



Knowledge Check

Complete these questions before reading the Suggested Answers.

Question 1

True or False

Every child reaches developmental milestones at exactly the same age

Answer: _____

Question 2

Name the five areas of child development.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Question 3

Why is observation important?

Question 4

True or False

An ECD Assistant should diagnose developmental delays.

Answer: _____

Question 5

Give two examples of how you can support a toddler's learning

1 _____

2 _____

Suggested Answers

Question 1: False.

Question 2: Physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development.

Question 3: Observation helps us understand children's strengths, interests, progress and support needs so that we can plan appropriate learning experiences.

Question 4: False. An ECD Assistant observes, supports and shares concerns with the ECD Practitioner.

Question 5: Possible answers include talking, reading stories, singing, encouraging play, supporting independence and providing safe opportunities to explore

End-of-Module Assessment

These questions will help you apply what you have learned.
There may be more than one good answer.

Scenario 1

A three-year-old who usually enjoys talking has become unusually quiet during the past week. What would you do?

Scenario 2

A toddler keeps trying to put on their own shoes but becomes frustrated.
How would you support the child?

Scenario 3

You notice that several children are fascinated by leaves, insects and birds during outdoor play.
How could this observation be used to support learning?

Suggested Answers

Scenario 1

Observe the child carefully over time, share your observations with the ECD Practitioner and continue providing reassurance and encouragement.

Scenario 2

Encourage the child's effort, offer gentle guidance without taking over immediately and praise their persistence.

Scenario 3

Share the observation with the ECD Practitioner and help plan activities such as nature walks, stories, songs, art or sorting activities based on children's interests

My Learning Journal

Complete these reflections.

The most important thing I learned about child development is:

One observation skill I want to improve is:

One way I will support children's learning more effectively is:

Glossary

Key words you will use throughout this Module.

Word	Meaning
Child Development	The process of growth and learning from birth onwards.
Developmental Milestones	Skills that children usually develop over time.
Observation	Watching and listening to understand children's development and learning.
Independence	Learning to do things for oneself.
Responsive Care	Responding warmly and appropriately to a child's needs.



Ready for Work Checklist

Before moving to Module 4, ask yourself:

- ☐ I understand the five areas of development.
- ☐ I know that every child develops at their own pace.
- ☐ I can support children's learning through everyday interactions.
- ☐ I know how to observe children respectfully.
- ☐ I understand when to share concerns with the ECD Practitioner.
- ☐ I am ready to continue my learning.

Looking Ahead

In Module 4 you will discover how children learn through play, stories, music, movement, art and everyday routines.

You will explore practical ideas that you can use to create enjoyable learning experiences, even in centres with limited resources.



CONGRATULATIONS!

You have completed Module 3 of Starting Strong.

Every child develops in their own unique way. By observing carefully, responding with kindness and creating meaningful opportunities for learning through play, you are helping to build strong foundations for children's future learning and wellbeing. Celebrate what you have achieved before beginning Module 4.