

Individualization and Me

A Guide for Teachers

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Head Start programs are committed to individualized services for children and families. Individualization promotes young children's healthy growth and development.

Individualization does not mean:

- ♣ Removing children from what they are doing to participate in a planned activity.
- ♣ Ending an activity because the schedule says so, rather than because children are finished.
- ♣ Providing a separate set of materials or planning one-on-one activities for each child to individualize the curriculum.
- ♣ Offering an activity that is the same for every child so that there is no variation in response to individual characteristics.

Individualization *does* mean:

- ♣ The ongoing process of recognizing each child's unique characteristics and planning a curriculum that responds to those differences.

Children experience success through individualization rather than failure and frustration!



Individualization is an essential part of a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

By using information from screenings, medical and dental evaluations, ongoing observations, and input from parents, we can plan a meaningful program that best responds to each child's individual abilities.

We individualize for children based on their:

1. **needs** (i.e. some support with communicating in English);
2. **interests** (i.e. stories about trucks);
3. **temperament** (i.e. easy going);
4. **learning style** (i.e. visual);
5. **likes and dislikes** (i.e. likes water play);
6. **health status** (i.e. healthy);
7. **developmental status** (i.e. passed the ESI-R, is strongest with gross motor skills);
8. **home language** (i.e. Arabic); and
9. **strengths** (i.e. describes what he/she is doing).

Home visits and parent teacher conferences are perfect opportunities for teachers and parents to talk about the child's characteristics, **including discussion about the child's developmental screening results and IEP evaluation if appropriate.** Based on the knowledge that is gained about the child, the teacher and the parent(s) set learning goals for the child around the High/Scope COR categories. Individualization allows staff and families to plan a curriculum that encourages children to use the skills that they already have and challenges them to develop new ones.

Goal Setting

Encouraging families to fully participate in the goal setting process takes intuition and great knowledge about child development. Think of the parents as your tour guide for learning about their child and you as the interested learner asking the right questions to gain the best understanding about the child. With your knowledge about how children

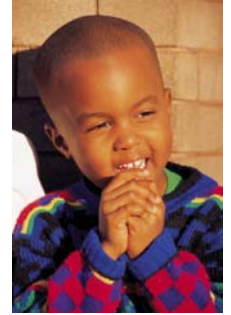


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develop, your realistic expectations for preschool children, and about the High/Scope curriculum, you can ask insightful questions of parents leading to the identification of meaningful goals that are neither too advanced nor too easily achieved.

Individual learning goals are:

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| 1. based on family input; | 6. developmentally and culturally appropriate; |
| 2. inclusive of IEP goals if appropriate; | 7. related to the High/Scope curriculum; |
| 3. strength-based; | 8. specific; and |
| 4. a description of what the child will do; | 9. measurable. |
| 5. an extension of what the child can do; | |



To obtain full participation of parents, asking the most appropriate questions is key to the information that you receive from them. Asking a general question like, “what goals do you have for your child,” or “what goals do you have for your child in the area of initiative and social relations,” is way too general and abstract, resulting in a very general answer with not much input from which to work. Rather, specific, yet open-ended questions can lead you to answers that give you a better idea of where the child is at and what his/her specific strengths and abilities are. Here is an example of a specific and appropriate question to ask: “have you observed your child trying to solve problems with things around the house (problems encountered when the child dresses him/herself; problems encountered when building; when using art supplies like glue, scissors, or tape; when looking for something; when playing outside)?” In addition, “can you tell me about how your child solves problems?” The response to these questions will give you and the parent more insight about the child’s abilities in the category of “initiative and social relations.” You and the parent(s) can use this information to form a goal and start planning adult strategies that can be used at home and at school. Parents are also encouraged to share other information about the child and to raise issues and concerns that allow you as partners to best support the child’s healthy development. **Remember to be accepting of the families’ thoughts and feelings even if they are different from your own and be respectful of the families’ cultural preferences for their child.**

Strategic Planning

During your informal and formal meetings with parents, you can discuss how you will use effective strategies at home and at school to support the learning goals that have been set. You can explain how you plan to use the information that they provided to individualize for their child in the classroom and help them plan strategies to use at home. This validates their input and demonstrates the importance of their contributions!

Strategies that promote individualization are effectively planned when writing lessons for children. In addition, some strategies are spontaneous and allow you to respond to teachable moments. When planning lessons, think of ways based on children’s screenings, medical and dental evaluations, ILP goals, other input

Besides the information that is gained from your communication with parents, you are encouraged to use other sources to individualize for children. Here are some other sources to look for information about the child:

1. Screening results and/or IEP evaluations
2. Anecdotal records
3. Photographs of children’s work and accomplishments
4. Samples of children’s work

This information is used:

- ♣ To share with families
- ♣ As part of the strategic planning process (reviewing progress, setting new goals, and developing new strategies) See the Strategic Planning Section for further details
- ♣ To support the child’s transition from Head Start to another child development program or to elementary school.

from families, and anecdotal notes/COR assessments that you can individualize for children by making adjustments to the program's curriculum. All elements of the program's curriculum can be individualized. The **learning environment** (including materials and equipment); **daily routine and transitions, daily schedule** (including teachable moments); **planned activities**; and **adult interactions** can all be adjusted. *Remember* to document children's initials on your lesson plans to show when they are supported by individualization during the given week. Which of these elements are easiest for you to individualize? Here are some questions for you to answer to analyze your individualization strategies.

- ♣ *Do you reflect children's cultures and home languages in play materials, songs, and stories, books and tapes, activities, labels and signs?*
- ♣ *Do you plan small group activities that include built-in opportunities for children to decide how they want to participate?*
- ♣ *Do you use a flexible approach to routines and transitions so that a child can eat when hungry or finish a painting before getting ready for the next activity?*
- ♣ *Do you tailor the level of encouragement and support in response to each child's ability to handle frustration and challenges?*

More generally, think of a child in your classroom and ask yourself the next set of questions. . .

1. How did you adapt or rearrange the indoor or outdoor **environment** to respond to an individual child?
2. How did you address a child's unique characteristics through **materials** and **equipment**?
3. What did you do to support a child's growth and development during a **routine** or **transition**?
4. How did you adjust the **schedule** to respond to a child?
5. How did you plan and implement an **activity** designed to include one or more specific children?
6. How did you **interact** with a child to match his or her need for **guidance or support**?
7. Am I sensitive to and respectful of **cultural and linguistic diversity**?
8. Were these above strategies **planned or spontaneous** and how did the **child respond**?



The last question about how children respond is what ongoing observation is all about. Your planned or spontaneous individualized strategies will support children and help them make developmental progress to achieve their identified learning goals.

Ongoing Assessment

Ongoing assessment is an important part of individualization because it ensures the Head Start children are continually being observed and that their progress is documented. Ongoing observations and anecdotal note taking are the basis of planning for individualization. Staff and families need up-to-date information to develop an individualized plan for children. **Ongoing assessment begins the first day of school and does not stop until the last day of school. Ongoing assessments are records of children's growing skills that guide your lesson planning and is evidence that children continue to achieve goals. Even if a child has achieved mastery on a particular COR item (level 5), their learning continues for this item. Therefore, children who are at a level five during the first or second time period are encouraged to refine their skills with new experiences for this item even later in the program year (time 3)- their learning in this area is always encouraged and supported.** Use anecdotes to update goals and plans for each child. In some instances, anecdotal notes lead staff and families to identify signs that a child has a health and/or developmental problem that was not identified during screening.

Self-Monitoring

It is important to self monitor your own individualization system at every level. To help you analyze your system, select two children in your class (preferably one with an IEP if this applies), then ask yourself:

<p style="text-align: center;">Screenings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ Has developmental screening for this child been conducted? ♣ Am I aware of the result? ♣ Has the parent signed off on the ILP indicating that they have been informed of the result? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Individual Learning Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ Is the IEP current? Are progress notes current? ♣ Do IEP goals relate with ILP goals on the ILP form? Have I planned a curriculum for children with disabilities to attain goals beyond those specified in the IEP?
<p style="text-align: center;">Observations and Anecdotal Notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ What anecdotes are written on this child? Are the notes objective and detailed enough so that they are useful? ♣ Do anecdotes support that progress is being made or that learning goals have been achieved? ♣ Am I using the anecdotes for this child to guide my planning of individualized learning plans? ♣ What communication do I have with this child's parent(s) his/her learning and development? Am I sharing my observations of the child with his/her parents and encouraging them to share their observations from home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ Am I using the most revised ILP form? Are ILPs current? Did the parent and I sign off on our last meeting? ♣ Are goals written appropriately? (i.e. based on family input, inclusive of IEP goals if appropriate, strength-based, developmentally and culturally appropriate, related to the High/Scope curriculum, specific, and measurable). ♣ Do ILP forms include family input and are goals based on family input? ♣ Have I been sensitive to cultural preferences of families? ♣ Once goals are met, is the date indicated- and a new goal formed? ♣ What ideas have the parent(s) and I discussed about supporting this child at home and at
<p style="text-align: center;">Documenting Individualized Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ Has this child been individualized for on a weekly basis- and is the individualized strategy appropriately chosen to support the goal (including IEP goal)? ♣ Have I documented that this child was supported by individualization by placing the child's initials on my lesson plans? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Working Together to Enhance Program Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ Do I know the child outcome results for my class? Were there areas that I personally want to enhance? ♣ Am I communicating, planning, and working together with my co-teacher to individualize for children?

This monitoring option allows you to go deep and allows you to learn about the patterns that might be barriers to the system. Did you identify any gaps in the system? If so, what are they and in what ways can they be addressed? Your intuition, knowledge of child development, understanding of the High/Scope approach, gift for working with families, ability to plan and strategize, desire to scaffold children's learning, and focused observation skills are key ingredients for how you individualize for children. By adapting and adjusting the curriculum elements in response to individual children, you can provide an individualized program that allows children to experience the success and love of learning.