



Focus on **EARLY CHILDHOOD**

Quick Guide in the *Life Experience Series*

Early childhood is the time in a child's life before they begin school full time.

You may think it's too soon to be thinking about your young child's future, but before you know it, they will be in school and then becoming adults! You will want to give your child the best possible start to prepare them for the next stages of life, and help them reach their vision for an inclusive, productive, full "good life" in the future.

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DAILY LIFE & EMPLOYMENT

What a person does as part of everyday life— school, employment, volunteering, communication, routines, life skills

Your child is learning and growing in so many ways. While the days of early childhood can be carefree and filled with playtime, it's important to think about how the life experiences your child is having right now are preparing them for being ready for school and eventually employment and daily life as an adult.

- If verbal communication is difficult for me, how are you helping me find ways to make my wants, needs, ideas, and thoughts known?
- Who will provide any extra help I need to attend preschool or daycare?
- How are you giving me opportunities to make choices?
- What is the vision you have in mind for my future as I learn and grow?
- What chores or responsibilities do I have at home, such as cleaning my room or picking up my toys?
- What are the routines/strategies that will help you and me throughout the day?



COMMUNITY LIVING

Where and how someone lives— housing and living options, community access, transportation, home adaptations and modifications

The neighborhoods and communities we grow up in can have a lifelong impact on us. Community living is not just about where we live, but about how we access and are involved in our communities. Your child can have opportunities to learn and develop everyday, whether at home or out and about in the community.

- Is our home in a district that promotes inclusive education, so I can learn and go to school with my siblings and other neighborhood children?
- Which household tasks can I do that will help me start learning how to keep a home?
- What age appropriate community places do I go and events (e.g. museums, seasonal outings, groups, and classes) do I attend?
- How can we adapt our home to better meet my needs?
- How are you helping me get out and about to explore and learn about my community?
- What assistive technology for myself or our vehicle do we need to be able to get around?



SAFETY & SECURITY

Staying safe and secure— emergencies, well-being, guardianship options, legal rights and issues

Safety is often at the forefront of our minds when it comes to our young children. We make sure cabinets have locks and that medicine is safely stored out of reach. In addition, helping your child to learn the valuable skills needed to play a role in their own safety and security can be very empowering and an important asset as they grow into adulthood.

- How are you teaching me to say “no” or tell someone if I feel uncomfortable or am being abused?
- How are you helping me learn about stranger danger and who I can trust?
- How are you teaching me what to do in an emergency?
- How does our disaster plan take my needs into account?
- How are you informing police, Emergency Medical Services, or fire department about emergency responses for me?
- What legal means have you established for someone to care for me in the event you are unable to do so?





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SOCIAL & SPIRITUALITY

Building friendships and relationships, leisure activities, personal networks, and faith community

We all want our children to be well liked, have friends and opportunities to socialize, and, if desired, practice their faith. It doesn't always happen automatically. Young children need to have plenty of opportunities to meet same age peers, discover what they like to do or they are good at, and have social, cultural or faith based experiences.

- How are you helping me be included with other children in social activities, play dates, and parties?
- What opportunities do I have to learn and practice social skills?
- How are you helping me find ways to do what other children in the community are doing for fun and recreation?
- What community opportunities am I involved in (e.g. play groups, Mom's Day Out, or parks and recreation activities)?
- How am I learning about our family's faith and spirituality practices and traditions such as prayer and beliefs?



HEALTHY LIVING

Managing and accessing health care and staying well – medical, mental health, behavioral health, developmental, wellness and nutrition

It's never too early to start teaching your child healthy habits such as eating nutritious food and getting plenty of physical activity. It is also important to have a team of health care professionals to advise, guide, and partner with you as you help your child develop a healthy lifestyle that will last well into the future.

- How are you helping my pediatrician understand and meet my needs?
- Does our pediatrician refer me to specialists when needed?
- Are you finding or accessing medical and health personnel experienced in caring for children with my diagnosis?
- What do you do if we don't like or disagree with my medical professionals?
- What therapies or activities help me to grow and develop?
- How are you teaching me about healthy, nutritious food and how my body works?
- How are you helping me get plenty of physical activity and exercise?



ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT

Building valued roles, making choices, setting goals, assuming responsibility and driving how one's own life is lived

You are your child's best advocate, whether with family, friends, school, or medical professionals. It's never too early to give your child opportunities to make choices for themselves, speak up for what they want, and give back to their community. Experiences now in advocacy and community involvement help prepare your young child to be a productive citizen as they grow into adulthood.

- Are you interested in learning about helping other parents or policy/systems change?
- Do you accept me as a child first, not a child with a disability?
- Do you present yourself as an expert regarding me and my needs?
- How are you helping me learn to be the expert on myself and my needs?
- What do you tell my siblings, extended family and friends about my diagnosis or special needs?
- How am I learning to follow rules at home and in other settings?
- How are you teaching me about volunteering or giving back to the community?





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SERVICES & SUPPORTS

Resources and strategies to promote the development, education, interests, and personal well-being of a person and that enhances individual and family functioning

We all use a variety of supports to help us get through our daily lives, including using our own assets and capabilities. Most of us have people in our lives who do things for us (and vice versa). We tap into technology, as well as businesses, organizations and resources in the community. Even though you may need paid services, remember to consider other types of support as well.

- What strengths or assets does our family bring to the table?
- Who else can we count on to be there when we need a helping hand?
- What technology can we use that would be helpful in taking care of me?
- What community resources might benefit me or our family?
- Do you have a basic understanding of public benefits I or our family might qualify for, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), Medicaid, Food Stamps, or other state and local eligibility-based sources?



FAMILY UNIT

What the family unit needs to support and be a successful part of their family member's life. Supports that are directed to the family will ultimately benefit the individual


Taking care of a young child can be one of the most rewarding and fulfilling experiences of our lives, but can also be exhausting and challenging. It is important to find time to take care of yourself, spend valued time with other family members, and do things as a family unit.

- Where can you connect with other parents/families one-on-one or in groups, online or in person?
- What are you doing to take a respite or short break from life's stresses?
- What do you do for yourself and my siblings to find balance with my needs?
- How are you teaching me about the cultures, traditions and values of our family?
- What are you doing to financially plan for my and our family's future (e.g. saving for college, opening an ABLE Account, setting up a Special Needs Trust)?

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:




charting the
**LIFECOURSE
NEXUS**

 UMKC Institute for Human Development, UCEDD
215 W. Pershing, 5th Floor
Kansas City, MO 64108

 lifecoursetools.com

 info@lifecoursetools.com

 800-779-8652