	# Participant Guide
All Sessions	**Basic Child Development**
Updated 6/2025	**8 Hours**

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Session 1 Overview

Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF) for Early Childhood Professionals Content Areas and Child Development Associate (CDA) Subject Areas

- KCF Content Area: I. Child Development and Learning
- CDA Subject Area: VIII. Principles of child development and learning

Course Description:
Explore the ages and stages of children's development and the factors that influence children's growth throughout this foundational training. Review the developmental milestones that guide children along the path of development throughout the first five years of life. Examine developmentally appropriate practice and the value of play in the lives of young children, as well as the importance of relationships in supporting children's future growth, learning, and success.

Learning Objectives:
Throughout this training, participants will:
- Explore key principles of child development and learning.
- Identify children's developmental learning domains and milestones.

Session 1 Overview

	Section Time	Key Concepts	Teaching Techniques
A	15 minutes	Welcome/Introductions Objectives review	Group Needs Assessment Individual Reflection
B	25 minutes	What is Child Development?	Large Group Brainstorm Small Group Discussion
C	20 minutes	Overview of Developmental Learning Domains	Video Small Group Activity Large Group Discussion
D	35 minutes	Exploring Developmental Milestones	Website review Video Large Group Brainstorm Large Group Activity
E	15 minutes	Early Intervention: Addressing Concerns	Large Group Discussion
F	10 minutes	Objectives Review	Closing
	Total Time: 2 hours		

Session Resources
- Help Me Grow MN: What are Milestones?
- ECIPS: Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards
- CICC: The Center for Inclusive Child Care
- Minnesota Department of Health Follow Along Program
- Parent Aware approved assessment tools

> **What is Child Development?**
> Child development refers to the process by which children grow and change from birth through adulthood. The early years from birth to age eight are especially critical as they lay the foundation for the skills children need for future learning and development.

Key Principles of Child Development and Learning
Adapted from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

1. Child development and learning are dynamic processes that are influenced by children's biology, such as their genetic and physical traits, and their environment, including family, culture, and experiences. These factors shape each other as well as children's future patterns of growth.

2. All domains of child development (physical, cognitive, social and emotional, language and communication) are important. These domains are interconnected and influence one another.

3. Play promotes joyful learning that fosters self-regulation, language, cognitive and social skills and abilities, as well as academic knowledge. Play is essential for all children, from birth through age eight.

4. Although children's development follows a general pattern of milestones, each child develops and grows at their own pace. Variations due to cultural contexts, experiences, and individual differences must also be considered.

5. Children are active learners from birth. They constantly take in and organize information to create meaning through their relationships, their interactions with their environment, and their overall experiences.

6. Children's motivation to learn is increased when their learning environment supports their sense of belonging, purpose, and independence. Curriculum and teaching methods build on children's development by connecting their experiences in the child care setting to their home and community settings.

7. Children learn in a way that connects multiple learning domains and subject areas. Because the foundations of subject area knowledge are established in early childhood, educators need an understanding of how children learn in each learning domain and know how to teach children effectively.

8. Development and learning advance when children are challenged to grow and learn at a level just beyond their current skill level and when they have many opportunities to reflect on and practice newly acquired skills.

9. When used responsibly and intentionally, technology and interactive media can be valuable tools for supporting children's development and learning.

Developmental Learning Domain Matching Game

Physical Development, S&E = Social and Emotional Development,
LLC = Language, Literacy, and Communication, C = Cognitive Development

Domain	Child Activity
	A toddler nests smaller objects inside larger objects.
	A four-year-old shows understanding, empathy, and compassion for others.
	A two-year-old remembers the sequence to a familiar action song.
	A three-year-old waits for a turn with a toy that she wants to play with.
	A toddler points to the door when asked if he wants to go outside.
	An infant responds to a caregiver's tone of voice and actions.
	An infant rolls from his tummy to his back.
	A four-year-old recites numbers in the correct sequence up to 10.
	A toddler shows awareness or caution with unfamiliar adults.
	A two-year-old begins to ask "why" questions.
	A two-year-old turns the pages of a book.
	A three-year-old recognizes shapes in the environment.
	A four-year-old puts on his own coat.

Website: Help Me Grow MN: What Are Milestones?
https://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/DevelopMilestone/index.html

Observation Assignment

Observe two children of similar ages and record their behaviors and activities.

What activities are the children engaged in?

What are the similarities and differences in their skills and abilities?

What can these children do?

What can they not yet do?

Do they like the same things?

Do they behave in the same ways?

What does this tell you about children's development?

Session 2 Overview

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Learning Objectives:
Throughout this training, participants will:
- Examine the foundations of early brain development and strategies to support healthy brain growth in young children.
- Identify practices that support children's social and emotional development.

Session 2 Overview

	Section Time	Key Concepts	Teaching Techniques
A	20 minutes	Welcome/Introductions, Objectives review, Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model	Large Group Discussion
B	30 minutes	Early Brain Development	Large Group Brainstorm Small Group Activity
C	30 minutes	The Role of Attachment	Pair and Share Small Group Activity Large Group Discussion
D	30 minutes	Key Areas of Social and Emotional Development	Executive Function Game Pair and Share Individual Reflection
E	10 minutes	Objectives Review/Closing	Final Thoughts
	Total Time: 2 hours		

Session Resources
- Zero to Three
- Brain Building Through Play: Activities for Infants, Toddlers, and Children
- National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)
- CSEFEL: Practical Strategies for Teachers/Caregivers
- Center for Inclusive Child Care

Brain-Building Exercises

Write a list of brain-building exercises for each age group.

0-6 months	6-12 months
12-24 months	**2 years**
3 years	**4 years**

Attachment

Relationships and early experiences help "fire" the synapses and affect the size, organization, and function of the brain. A child's brain will develop differently based on the nature of the relationships that surround them. The picture on the left shows a healthy, emotionally developed brain. The picture on the right shows the result of abuse and neglect. The dark areas show where the brain is inactive or undeveloped. As child care providers, we must support all children's social and emotional development and provide nurturing care and support healthy attachment.

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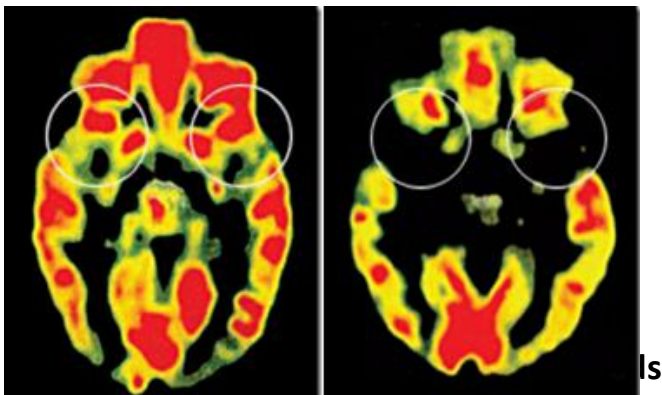
Child's emotions	Child's behavior	What the child needs	What the educator can do
Sadness			
Anger, overwhelmed			
Frustration			
Fear and anxiety			
Happiness, joy, excitement			

Emotional Regulation Strategies

Model Emotional Regulation
- Children learn by watching the adults, including how they respond during times of adversity. Model appropriate responses, such as using deep breathing methods, using a calm tone of voice, using a calm-down space, and responding respectfully to others.
- Describe what you are doing to calm yourself: "I'm frustrated, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths to calm down."
- When a child is overwhelmed, use co-regulation skills to help the child calm down. Stay near the child, use a comforting tone of voice, and validate their feelings.

Teach Emotional Vocabulary
- Read books, use emotion cards, or share social stories to help children understand and respond to social cues.
- Use puppets or act out scenarios together to demonstrate appropriate responses.

Use Visual Schedules and Routines
- Visual cues help children to know what is coming next, which helps reduce anxiety. Use pictures of your daily activities from your environment to help children understand transitions.
- Invite children to help define the classroom rules to develop belonging and ownership in the environment.

Offer Children Choices
- Choices provide a sense of control and reduce power struggles. Give two choices to encourage participation (e.g., "Will you pick up the blocks or books first?" "Would you like applesauce or bananas for lunch?")

Create a Calm-Down Space
- Designate a quiet, cozy space with soft pillows, sensory items, stuffed toys, and books.
- Model using the calm down space so children understand how to use it when they are overwhelmed and need space and time to themselves.

Practice Breathing and Movement Techniques
- Teach belly breathing, blowing bubbles, or pretending to blow out candles.
- Incorporate stretching or animal walks to release physical energy and improve focus.

Support Children's Needs and Skill Development
- Address any medical or biological factors that are impacting children's behaviors (underlying medical or developmental conditions, lack of sleep, hunger, thirst, etc.)
- Create a sense of safety and security in the environment and help children cope with adversity and trauma.
- Create an inclusive and accessible environment that supports children's diverse abilities, experiences, and sensory needs.
- Note children's developmental needs and provide opportunities for them to practice and develop new skills.

Session 3 Overview

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Learning Objectives:
Throughout this training, participants will:
- Describe children's development through a cultural lens.
- Define the stages of language and cognitive development in early childhood.

Session 3 Overview

	Section Time	Key Concepts	Teaching Techniques
A	10 minutes	Welcome and Objectives Review	Large Group Discussion
B	25 minutes	Understanding Child Development Through a Cultural Lens	Large Group Discussion Individual Activity
C	30 minutes	Six Stages of Language Development	Large Group Discussion Pair and Share Large Group Discussion
D	40 minutes	Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development	Large Group Discussion Small Group Activity
E	15 minutes	Objectives Review/Closing	Individual Activity
	Total Time: 2 hours		

Session Resources
- Cox Campus, Atlanta Speech School

Acronyms
- NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children
- DAP: Developmentally Appropriate Behavior Guidance
- ECIPS: Early Childhood Indicators of Progress

Creating Culturally Responsive Environments

Place a star beside the practices that you are doing well. Note areas for improvement with an X and use the box below to describe the steps you will take to reach your goals in this area.

	Learn about each child and family and intentionally adapt and respond to their strengths and needs.
	Show children that we see and value all aspects of them, including their full range of emotions, and attributes related to their race, and culture (Price and Steed, 2016). This is a critical step in helping children feel welcome and connected to their educators and peers.
	Create an environment that is a place children and families want to be (e.g., reflects children's home and cultures, feels comfortable, welcoming, and safe).
	Develop a sense of trust by providing a physically and emotionally safe environment. A sense of trust is crucial because it sets the stage for children to engage freely in exploration and learning.
	Teach children how to care for one another by helping each other, inviting another child to play together, celebrating accomplishments, and giving compliments.
	Give children opportunities to be leaders in the classroom and helpers to their peers.
	Represent families in the classroom with family photos, projects, and other materials created by families and children.
	Use Developmentally Appropriate practice by considering your knowledge about individual children and families when planning activities.
	Show appreciation and gratitude to children and families, and support and celebrate them as they reach their goals.
	Reflect on your mindset and attitudes when responding to children's behavior and developmental needs.
	Develop an understanding of your own cultural reference points, and continue to grow your professional and cultural knowledge.
Notes:	

Literacy-Rich Environments

Create a list of the ways to support children's language and communication development. Include activities, interactions, materials, and learning experiences.

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-
-
-
-

Cognitive Development Scenarios

Read through each of the scenarios and identify the developmental stages or behaviors described in the scenario. Discuss how you would support the child's cognitive development and answer the following questions:

- A 10-month-old cries when his parent leaves him at child care to go to work.

- An 18-month-old repeatedly dumps the same bucket of blocks.

- A three-year-old thinks that the moon is following her to child care.

- A four-year-old cries when his friend's cookie breaks in half, because she has more.

- A 2-year-old struggles to complete a puzzle and throws the pieces on the floor.

- A four-year-old becomes upset when she isn't first in line to wash her hands.

- A five-year-old pretends a stick is a magic wand and "casts spells" on her friends.

What does this behavior tell you about the child's development?

How does your response to the child support their cognitive thinking skills?

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Field Work: The Power of Playful Learning

Child's Age:

Date & Time:

Location in the Environment:

Description of Play:

Who decided what to play? Was it child-led or teacher-directed?

What skills did the child strengthen? (Social-emotional, Cognitive, Physical, Language and Communication)

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Session 4 Overview

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Learning Objectives:
Throughout this training, participants will:

- Support children's growth by providing them with meaningful learning experiences in a developmentally appropriate environment.
- Describe strategies for engaging families as partners in their children's learning.

Session 4 Overview

	Section Time	Key Concepts	Teaching Techniques
A	15 minutes	Welcome/Objectives review Observation review	Pair and Share
B	30 minutes	When I play, I learn…	Large Group Brainstorm Large Group Discussion Small Group Activity Large Group Discussion
C	20 minutes	Six Stages of Play	Small Group Discussion Individual Reflection
D	30 minutes	DAP Environments and Curricula	
E	15 minutes	Engaging Families in the Child's Learning	Large Group Discussion
F	10 minutes	Objectives Review/Closing	Closing Remarks
	Total Time: 2 hours		

Session Resources
- ECIPS: Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards

Acronyms
- NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children
- DAP: Developmentally Appropriate Behavior Guidance
- ECIPS: Early Childhood Indicators of Progress

> **Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) refers to** methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning.

When I play, I learn…

For each play activity, write three skills children are learning through their play.

When I play with blocks, I learn:	• Math and geometry skills: Sizes, shapes, and patterns • Spatial awareness: Stacking and balancing, how objects relate to each other in space, basics of physics • Engineering design: planning, creating, and problem-solving • Social and emotional skills: turn-taking, sharing, and cooperation
When I play in the sand and water table, I learn:	
When I play pretend, I learn:	
When I play with puzzles, I learn:	
When I play on climbers, balance beams, and slides, I learn:	
When I play with playdough, I learn:	
When I play tag, I learn:	

The Environment as the Third Teacher. Alongside the child's family and early educators, a high-quality environment is carefully designed to inspire curiosity, creativity, and collaboration, with the child's needs, interests, and culture in mind.
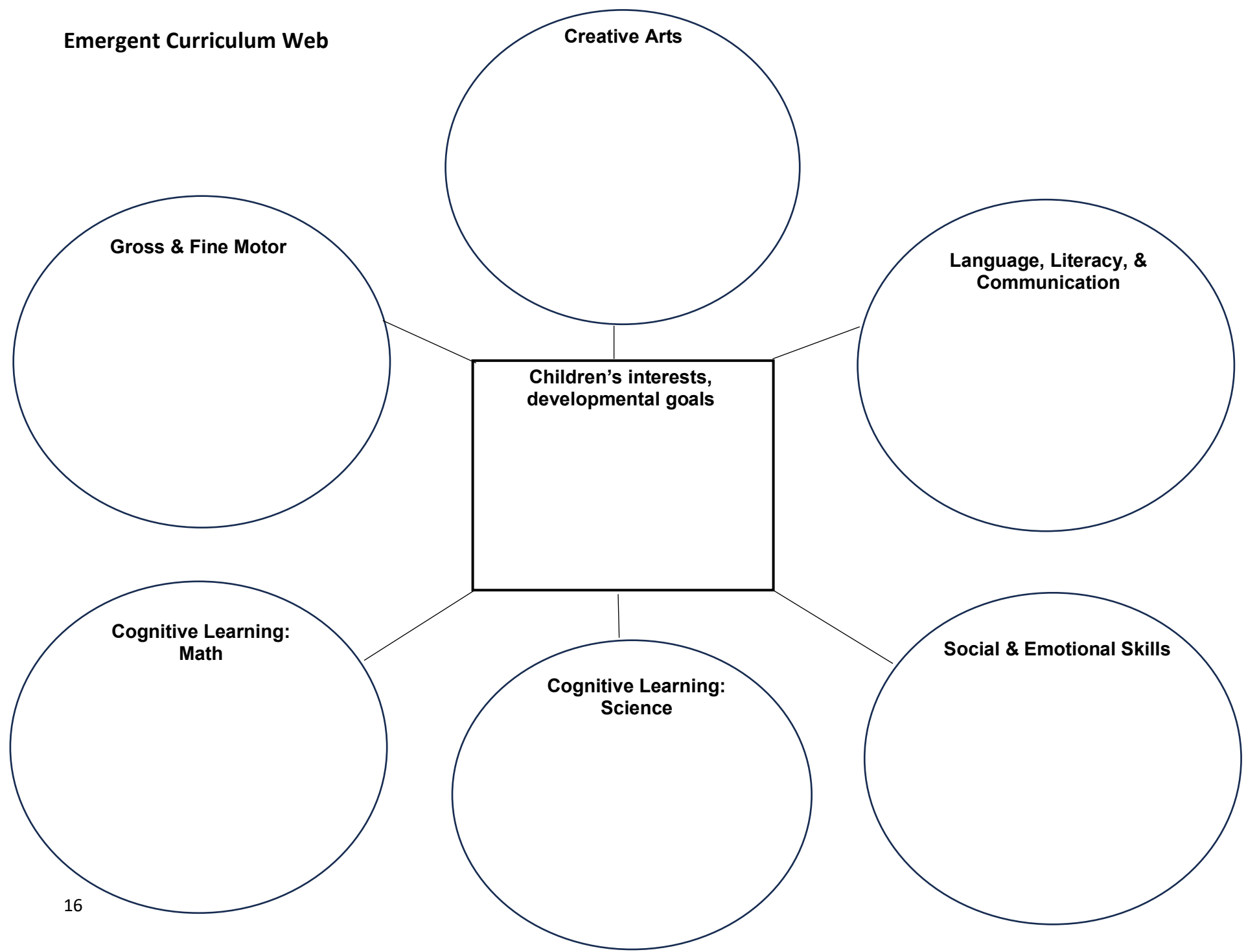
Environmental Reflection:

Visualize your early childhood environment. As you mentally walk around your program, ask yourself these questions about the materials and activities. Make notes of the changes you will implement.
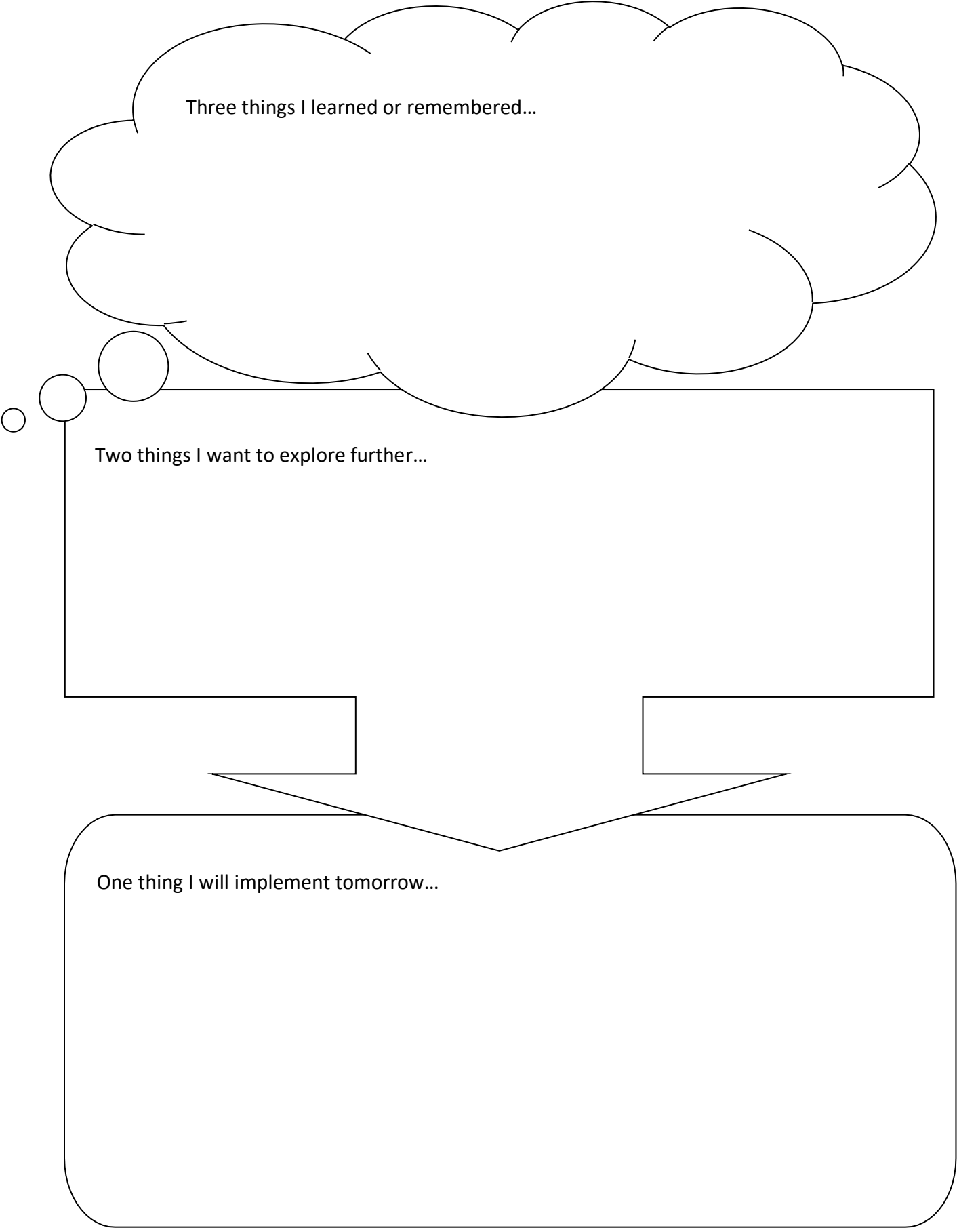
- What might children learn from these items and activities?

- Why are we offering these toys and materials? Are children interested in them? Are they displayed in a way that invites play and exploration?

- What can I add to support children's current interests and development?

- What kind of routine does this group of children need? Do they need more time to play?

- What is the tone of the environment? Is it joyful with plenty of time for free play and exploration, or does it feel restrictive?

- Is the environment well organized, or is it cluttered?

- Are the colors and sounds peaceful and soothing, or loud and overstimulating?

- If you were a child in this classroom day after day, how would you feel about your time here? Would you be excited or delighted to spend your day here?

List three changes to implement:

1.

2.

3.

Emergent Curriculum Web

Creative Arts

Gross & Fine Motor

Language, Literacy, & Communication

Children's interests, developmental goals

Cognitive Learning: Math

Cognitive Learning: Science

Social & Emotional Skills

16

Three things I learned or remembered…

Two things I want to explore further…

One thing I will implement tomorrow…