



Washington State  
Early Support for  
Infants and Toddlers

**CORE COMPETENCIES**



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**





## Washington State Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) Core Competencies Acknowledgments

These competencies were developed using the framework of and expanding on the publication *Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals* (EPS\_0023) available online at [www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EPS\\_0023.pdf](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EPS_0023.pdf).

The Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) Competencies Workgroup developed, reviewed, and edited these competencies. Anne Lucas with the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center and Alise Paillard with the National Center for Systemic Improvement contributed to the review of these competencies.

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The Washington Association for Infant Mental Health (WA-AIMH) Infant Family Specialist Competencies are integrated throughout and indicated with an asterisk. For more information, go to [www.wa-aimh.org/endorsement/competency-requirement-details/cat2-competencies](http://www.wa-aimh.org/endorsement/competency-requirement-details/cat2-competencies). © MI-AIMH

The Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices were used as a guide in development. For more information, go to [www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices](http://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices).

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# ESIT Competencies: An Overview



Developing the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) Competencies was an activity of Washington's Part C State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). The goal of the SSIP is to improve social-emotional outcomes of infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. Incorporating the Washington Association for Infant Mental Health (WA-AIMH) competencies assured that social-emotional competencies were embedded throughout. This document is the result of the combined efforts of many ESIT professionals across disciplines throughout Washington State.

The ESIT Program is housed within the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). ESIT staff worked with DCYF professional development staff to closely align the ESIT competencies to those in the the publication *Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals* (EPS\_0023) available online at [www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EPS\\_0023.pdf](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EPS_0023.pdf). The Core Competencies represent best practices for all practitioners who work with children. The eight content areas of the ESIT Competencies build upon and mirror those in the Core Competencies. While the Core Competencies describe adult to child competencies and the Relationship-Based Professional Development Standards available online at [www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/RBPDStandards.pdf](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/RBPDStandards.pdf) describe adult to adult competencies, the ESIT Competencies blend both adult-to-child and adult-to-adult competencies. The merger of competencies creates a framework of understanding how both child-to-adult and adult-to-adult relationships intersect to best meet the needs of infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

## Competencies are Important Because They:

- Define what ESIT professionals need to know and be able to do to provide quality services for children and families.
- Serve as the foundation for decisions and practices carried out by ESIT professionals.
- Create an integral foundation for a comprehensive system of personnel development.

## Different Ways the Competencies May Be Used:

### ESIT Providers

- Assess level of knowledge and skill in eight content areas
- Identify specific areas of need for professional development (e.g., training, education)

### Program Administrators

- Specify professional development requirements for job descriptions
- Develop staff professional development plans and policies

### Trainers

Plan and organize professional development opportunities linked to competencies

### Higher Education Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

- Assess current program content to determine course development
- Coordinate and design course content linked to competencies that will promote workforce readiness

### State and Local Agencies

Develop and implement training programs that will enhance the learning of ESIT professionals



## Guiding Concepts for ESIT

### ESIT Mission:

The purpose of the ESIT program is to build upon family strengths by providing coordination, supports, resources, and services to enhance the development of children with developmental delays and disabilities through everyday learning opportunities.

### ESIT Principles:

1. Families are equal partners who bring to the team skills, experience, and knowledge about their child and are the final decision-makers on what will work best for their family.
2. ESIT recognizes that family relationships are the central focus in the life of an infant or toddler.
3. Infants and toddlers learn best through everyday experiences and interactions with familiar people in familiar settings.
4. The ESIT process, from initial contact to transition, must be responsive, flexible, and individualized to reflect the child's and family's priorities, learning styles, and cultural beliefs.
5. All families, with the necessary supports and resources, can enhance their children's learning and development.
6. The role of the service provider is to work in a team to support Individualized Family Service Plan functional outcomes based on child and family needs and priorities.
7. ESIT practices must be based on the best available current evidence and research.

### Family Outcomes:

To enable families to care for their child and participate in family and community activities, families will:

- Know their rights.
- Effectively communicate their child's needs.
- Help their child develop and learn.

### Child Outcomes:

To help children be active and successful participants across a variety of settings and situations, children will demonstrate improved:

- Positive social-emotional skills and social relationships.
- Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, including language and communication.
- Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

# Organization of the ESIT Competencies

## Content Areas

Each content area describes the attitudes, knowledge, and skills professionals need to work with infants, toddlers, and families enrolled in the ESIT program. Some areas may identify several subsections of skills, and others may also identify knowledge and skills together in instances where they are not easily separated. Knowledge can be assessed and skills can be observed or demonstrated. Attitudes are dispositions that are not easily observable or assessed – but instead are determined through reflection and inquiry.

We recognize that professionals increase their knowledge and skills in a progression of cumulative ongoing development. These competencies will continue to be further defined to map out a progression or professional development pathway. This will allow professionals to assess their needs and focus on areas of growth within competency areas for ESIT. Defining this progression will also identify specialization and promote leadership within the field.



### Content Area 1:

#### CHILD GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Understand the wide range of children's development across individual, cultural, and community differences.

### Content Area 2:

#### CURRICULUM AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (SUPPORTS AND SERVICES IN NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS)

Provide ESIT supports and services in natural environments. The name of this section has been changed from the Core Competencies to reflect the unique aspects of providing services in natural environments and within family routines.

### Content Area 3:

#### ONGOING MEASUREMENT OF CHILD PROGRESS

Conduct family-centered, strengths-based screenings, evaluations, and ongoing assessments.

### Content Area 4:

#### FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Develop strong relationships with families and work collaboratively with community members and service providers to meet families' needs.

### Content Area 5:

#### HEALTH, SAFETY, AND NUTRITION

Support culturally relevant family and caregiver routines that promote health, well-being, and development of the child.

### Content Area 6:

#### INTERACTIONS

Promote healthy attachment relationships between families/caregivers and children and establish supportive relationships with families and children.

### Content Area 7:

#### PROGRAM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Implement best practices across services and use data for program evaluation and improvement.

### Content Area 8:

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Serve children and families and collaborate with team members in a professional manner.



## 1. CHILD GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

**A. (Attitudes)** Values the wide range of children’s development across individual, cultural, and community differences, and respects family beliefs about health and developmental differences.

**B. (Knowledge)** Demonstrates understanding of child development across families, cultures, experiences, and developmental domains, including the following:

1. Conditions that optimize early infant brain development.”\*
2. Potential impacts and opportunities of environmental factors on child development and learning (for example, impacts of early trauma and opportunities for resilience).
3. Functional development across the “three child outcomes” (positive social relationships, knowledge and skills, and taking actions to meet needs).
4. Current research in early brain development, major learning theories, and interrelationships across developmental domains.

**C. (Skills)** Supports children and families and promotes individual child development, including the following:

1. Explains the range of social-emotional, cognitive, communication, physical, and adaptive differences to families and caregivers.
2. Embraces and integrates cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and socio-economic relevance by partnering with families and caregivers to support home languages, bilingual development, and family traditions in daily routines.
3. Demonstrates strategies to support infants’ and toddlers’ healthy racial, cultural, gender, and disability identity development in partnership with families.

\*WA-AIMH Infant Family Specialist competencies © MI-AIMH  
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## 2. CURRICULUM AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT *(Supports and Services in Natural Environments)*

### A. (Attitudes) Values, respects, and promotes:

1. Child and family strengths and individual differences.
2. Supports and services rooted in family cultural perspectives and home language(s).
3. Development and learning in the context of participation in everyday routines and activities in natural environments.
4. Listening, modeling, coaching, and teaming with family members and other service providers. Social-emotional development as the foundation for all learning and development.
5. Social-emotional development as the foundation for all learning and development.

### B. (Knowledge and Skills) Promotes healthy social-emotional development:

1. Explains and encourages healthy attachment and relationships between children and families/caregivers.
2. Encourages children and families/caregivers to express feelings and assert themselves.
3. Recognizes and supports unique temperaments, individual preferences, sensory needs, and strategies to support self-regulation.
4. Supports opportunities for siblings of all ages to play and learn together.
5. Creates opportunities with children and families/caregivers for shared mindfulness, self-reflection, and creative expression.
6. Acknowledges family members' views and feelings about developmental delays and disabilities and supports a journey toward embracing each individual's unique identities.

### C. (Knowledge and Skills) Provides high-quality **home-based supports and services** that promote children's development across all domains— adaptive/self-help, cognitive, communication, physical/motor, and social-emotional:

1. Co-designs strategies to support children's development embedded in family routines and activities.
2. Emphasizes use of materials available in the home to support children's development and provides families with access to additional resources to address individual adaptive needs, as appropriate.

3. Helps families/caregivers understand the importance of play and developmental processes across all domains and within particular areas of challenge.
4. Promotes back and forth communication with children and families/caregivers, including cue-reading, gestures, signs, and words with support for home language(s) and bilingual development when appropriate.
5. Varies play and interactions to correspond to a child's individual preferences, abilities, and learning needs.

### D. (Knowledge and Skills) Provides high-quality **community-based supports and services** in natural environments (for example, child care, playgroups, outings, and field trips) by creating inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant learning opportunities:

1. Supports all children's home languages, cultures, and healthy identity development.
2. Scaffolds activities to ensure each child's full engagement and participation and opportunities for children of all ages and abilities to play and learn together.
3. Incorporates anti-bias approaches and curriculum that supports understanding multiple perspectives, inclusion, and standing up for fairness.
4. Provides learning materials, equipment, and adaptations which are culturally and linguistically relevant, developmentally appropriate, and tailored to children's individual needs.
5. Listens to and coaches families/caregivers using strengths-based inclusive strategies to promote all children's healthy development.
6. Facilitates participation in community-based playgroups and other group settings where typically developing children are engaged.
7. Provides opportunities to learn across community settings such as libraries, grocery stores, parks, playgrounds, etc.



### 3. ONGOING MEASUREMENT OF CHILD PROGRESS

**A. (Attitudes)** Values a family-centered, strengths-based approach to support families/caregivers during screening, eligibility evaluation, and through ongoing assessment that builds families' and caregivers' capacities to support their children's development.

**B. (Knowledge)** Selects and administers culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate tools and methods for screening, evaluation, and functional assessment, including considerations for potential biases related to language, culture, assistive technology, sensory disability, or other.

**C. (Skills)** Actively engages families/caregivers in all aspects of the screening, evaluation, and functional assessment processes based on the families' and caregivers' resources, concerns, priorities, and routines, especially for the three global child outcome descriptor statements.

1. Summarizes and interprets screening, assessment, and evaluation results in a meaningful and supportive way for families/caregivers considering potential biases (e.g., language and culture).
2. Formally and informally observes the families/caregivers and infant/very young child to understand the nature of their relationship, developmental strengths, and capacities for change.\*
3. Recognizes risks and disorders of infancy/early childhood conditions that require the assistance of other professionals from health, mental health, education, and child welfare systems.\* Makes referrals to and collaborates with professionals from these systems.

**D. (Skills)** Develops functional, meaningful Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) outcomes for children and families/caregivers based on assessment information, family concerns and priorities, and the child's interests and needs within the context of their daily routines and activities.

1. Collaborates with the multidisciplinary team, including families and caregivers, to develop strategies, activities, services, and supports to address outcomes and enhance learning and participation in natural environments.
2. Adapts the IFSP, including outcomes, as the child grows and changes, or as child and family/caregiver interests, needs, and priorities change.

**E. (Skills)** Monitors children's progress on outcomes through family/caregiver report, observation, ongoing assessment, documentation, and communication with other service providers, then applies this knowledge to practice.

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## 4. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

**A. (Attitudes)** Values families' and caregivers' culture, beliefs, and expertise as equal partners on the team.

**B. (Knowledge)** Demonstrates understanding of family systems, culture, and the impact on families of having a child with special needs.

**C. (Skills)** Builds and maintains effective interpersonal relationships with families/caregivers and professional colleagues.\*

1. Respects and promotes the decision-making authority of families.
2. Understands and respects the beliefs and practices of the family's culture.
3. Follows the families' lead.
4. Follows through consistently on commitments and promises.
5. Provides regular communications and updates.
6. Establishes trusting relationships that support the family and infant/very young child in their relationship with each other, facilitating change.
7. Communicates honestly, sensitively, and empathetically with families, using non-technical language.

**D. (Skills)** Applies principles of family centered practice:

1. Uses relationship-based coaching strategies to build on families' strengths to enhance their confidence and competence.
2. Assists families to develop the skills they need to become their own advocates.\*

**E. (Knowledge and Skills)** Demonstrates knowledge of community resources both within and outside of ESIT and assists families in accessing resources:

1. Informs families of applicable resources including adaptive equipment when needed.
2. Uses appropriate referral processes when needed.
3. Works collaboratively with other community resources to ensure coordinated services.
4. Helps families build the skills they need to access social support from extended family, neighbors, and friends as needed and as available in the community.\*
5. Encourages parents to share with other parents.\*
6. Obtains and works effectively with interpreters when needed to ensure effective communication with families who may experience a communication barrier.\*

**F. (Skills)** Participates in the development of IFSPs that are family-centered and culturally relevant.

**G. (Skills)** Supports families with coordinated, effective, equitable, and culturally and linguistically responsive transitions from ESIT to preschool special education services and/or the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Head Start, and other high-quality early childhood settings.

**H. (Knowledge and Skills)** Demonstrates understanding of parent rights and procedural safeguards, explains them clearly to families, and completes required forms.

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## 5. HEALTH, SAFETY, AND NUTRITION

- A. (Attitudes)** Supports culturally relevant family and caregiver routines that promote the health, well-being, and development of the child.
- B. (Skills)** Addresses implicit bias in best practices for daily routines (feeding, sleep, nutrition, etc.) and works to meet and support families in their cultural context.
1. Applies holistic approach to help children and families/caregivers improve sleep routines and well-being with consideration of sensory needs, social-emotional support, and family cultures.
  2. Supports families/caregivers in their engagement in feeding routines and understanding of nutrition with respect to cultural differences and addressing the unique needs of their child.
- C. (Knowledge)** Understands potential impacts of disability, including medically fragile conditions, on social-emotional, health, safety, and nutrition needs and provides support to families.
- D. (Skills)** Supports families/caregivers to understand and safely address challenging behaviors, including when and where to ask for help.
- E. (Knowledge and Skills)** Understands and adheres to laws pertaining to the health and general well-being of children and families.
- F. (Skills)** Recognizes and follows procedures for documentation and notification of suspected abuse and neglect in partnership with families and other service providers when appropriate.





## 6. INTERACTIONS

**A. (Attitudes)** Values and promotes warm interactions and healthy attachment relationships between families/caregivers and children.

**B. (Knowledge)** Demonstrates an understanding of different patterns of parent and child interactions and attachment and their impact on child development.

1. Recognizes potential challenges to bonding and attachment, including diagnosis, illness, hospitalization, feeding or sleeping concerns, traumatic experiences, and others.
2. Recognizes that infants communicate their needs through a variety of behaviors that indicate whether an infant is ready to socially engage, not feeling physically comfortable, sleepy, or in emotional distress, to assist families/caregivers to respond appropriately.
3. Recognizes cultural variations in how families/caregivers engage with infants and toddlers and seeks to support mutual enjoyment between child and family.

**C. (Skills)** Provides information and assistance to parents/or caregivers to help them:\*

1. Understand their role in the social and emotional development of infants/very young children.
2. Understand what they can do to promote health, language, physical, self-help, and cognitive development in infancy and early childhood.
3. Find pleasure in caring for their infants/very young children.
4. “See” the infant/very young child as a person, as well as all the factors (playing, holding, teaching, etc.) that constitute effective parenting of that child.

**D. (Skills)** Collaborates with families and caregivers to develop individualized and culturally appropriate expectations for the response loop between child and caregiver during interactions.

1. Supports and reinforces each family member’s strengths, emerging parenting competencies, and positive parent-infant/very young child interactions and relationships.
2. Supports families to promote children’s problem-solving behavior by observing, interpreting, and scaffolding in response to growing autonomy and self-regulation.
3. Supports families to promote children’s social-emotional development by observing, interpreting, and responding to the range of emotional expressions of both child and family/caregiver.
4. Supports families to promote age-appropriate interactions between children and their siblings and peers.

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## 7. PROGRAM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- A. (Attitudes)** Recognizes the importance of and implements a plan addressing continuous quality improvement for program evaluation and improvement.
- B. (Skills)** Implements best practices, including current research, evidence-based, and promising practices for ESIT service delivery.
- C. (Skills)** Utilizes home visit observation and feedback to facilitate quality improvement.
- D. (Skills)** Accurately and clearly explains the provisions and requirements of federal, state, and local laws affecting infants/young children and families (e.g., Part C of IDEA, child protection, child care licensing rules and regulations) to families and other service providers working with the family.\*
- E. (Skills)** Personally works within the requirements of:\*
  1. Federal and state law.
  2. Agency policies and practices.
  3. Professional codes of conduct.
  4. State and local funding sources.
- F. (Skills)** Practices confidentiality of each family's information in all contexts with exception only when making necessary reports to protect the safety of a family member (e.g., Children's Protective, Duty to Warn).\*

## 8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP

- A. (Attitudes)** Values growth mindset and ongoing professional development activities to continually enhance competence and stay informed of the knowledge base of the evolving infant and early childhood, early intervention, and specific professional fields.
- B. (Knowledge)** Actively seeks to recognize and integrate the world views of culturally diverse communities, including values, assumptions, communication styles, group norms, experiences, and perspectives.
- C. (Skills)** Adheres to standards of professionalism, including:
  1. Honesty and integrity.
  2. Dependability and responsibility.
  3. Effective use of time.
  4. Initiative and problem-solving.
  5. Professional boundaries with families.
  6. Use of equity lens for program decisions.
  7. Clear written and verbal communication.
  8. Seeks out professional relationships to enhance professional growth (e.g., mentoring).
  9. Recognizes causes and symptoms of burnout/compassion fatigue and promotes self-care as a means of prevention.
- D. (Skills)** Uses reflective practice throughout work with infants/young children and families to understand own emotional response to infant/family work and recognize areas for professional and/or personal development.\*
- E. (Skills)** Participates in effective teaming through reflective collaboration and consultation that values multiple, diverse perspectives.
  1. Exchanges complete and unbiased information in a supportive manner with families and other team members.\*
  2. Integrates all available information and consults with others when making important decisions.\*
  3. Generates new insights and workable solutions to issues related to effective relationship-focused, family-centered care.\*

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