Progress Reports in Child Care
Why Progress Reports?

- Support communication with parents
- Help with program planning
- Support transitions to new programs / classrooms

• To support communication with parents about the child’s growth and development. Parents see one aspect of the child, but the early ed. and care program sees another. Sometimes children behave differently outside the home, and sometimes they demonstrate skills, interests or abilities that they haven’t had the opportunity to share at home. Parents are better able to support their children if they have more input about the child.

• To help in program planning: Knowing what children can and cannot yet do and what they are interested in can help to design activities that interest and encourage children. Children’s interests can become the topic for learning, exploration and skill development of all kinds: cognitive, social / emotional, linguistic, and fine and gross motor.

• To support transitions to new programs. Teachers working with children new to their classroom or program will be better equipped to support and encourage the child if they know something about that child’s interests and abilities from the outset. Progress reports can be very valuable tools in getting children and teachers off on the right foot.
At enrollment...

- Gather information from parents about child’s interests, skills and development

At the time of enrollment in your program, gather information from parents about the child’s development, skills and interests so far. Most parents enjoy talking about their children. If you give them an opportunity to tell you what they are proud of, and an opportunity to share concerns, this will begin to build a relationship between you and the parents, establish a pattern for future communications, and give you baseline data against which you can measure the child’s progress as time goes on.
What’s involved in progress reports?

Observation!

• Ongoing, daily
• Planned, scheduled

Every moment that children are in the program offers an opportunity for them to demonstrate new skills, and for educators to observe their growth. Educators should be alert to these changes, and take note of them as they happen.

To be sure that observations are made across all developmental domains for each child, it may also be necessary to plan or schedule specific times to observe particular children during certain activities.
Children’s activities illustrate their development across domains. The developmental domains are cognitive (intellectual, thinking, sensing); social / emotional, language, fine and gross motor, and life skills. It is important to observe them during all types of activities, and gather data about performance and skills across all of the developmental domains.
What’s involved in progress reports?

**Documentation!**

- Daily, weekly or every other week
- Over time (at least 3 months)

• Children grow and change so quickly that it is important to observe them frequently…ideally documenting observations daily as they are made, but at least once a week or every other week.

• Child development is uneven, sometimes proceeding slowly in one area and rapidly in another; or showing little progress for a while and then changing with leaps and bounds.

• Every day is not the same. A child’s performance on a specific day will be affected by how well rested s/he is, whether s/he feels well or is coming down with a cold or the flu; or whether s/he is worried about a problem at home or at school. This makes it very important to document observations at repeated intervals.
To document progress, use:

- Anecdotal Notes
- Portfolios
- Checklists

To make sure that you have the information you need to develop a periodic progress report, you will need to develop a system to record your observations. There are many different ways to do this, and you should choose the one that works best for you.

Three of the most popular are anecdotal notes, portfolios, and checklists.

If you choose to use anecdotal notes, it may be helpful to carry "sticky notes" or a small note pad with you at all times so that you can jot down a note or two on the spot without interrupting your supervision or activities. These individual notes about children can later be transferred to the child’s folder or notebook for later use.

For planned or scheduled observations, you can record your notes directly in the child’s individual notebook.

Carrying a hand-held, micro-cassette recorder can be useful for recording anecdotal notes about planned and unplanned observations, which can later be transcribed and placed in children’s note-books or folders. A hand-held recorder can also be useful in recording children’s speech if you plan to maintain a portfolio for the child. Similarly, carrying a small camera to have at the ready will be useful in gathering snapshots for inclusion in a portfolio.
To use anecdotal notes:

Briefly describe:
- Who is involved?
- What are they doing?
- How high?
- How fast?
- How loud?
- How colorful?
- Child or teacher initiated?

If you choose to record progress using anecdotal notes, you briefly describe what the child is doing. For example, is the child reading, drawing, writing, building a block tower, dressing up in play clothes, riding a bike?

Describe how it is being done, giving lots of details: for example, how high is the block tower (how many blocks high)? How many different colors is the child using in the drawing? Is the child writing letters, words, sentences, a story? How well is the child able to ride the bike, or is it a tricycle? Does it have training wheels? Is the child able to start, slow, stop, turn without difficulty? Is the child working silently, or singing to himself, or talking to others nearby? Also, how did the activity come about? Did the child choose the activity independently, was it suggested by an educator, or did the child respond to an invitation from another child?

Describe who is involved in the activity: Is the child working alone, working independently but in a group of other children doing a similar activity, or is the child part of a group of children all working on a block castle, or playing soccer or a board game?
Make anecdotal notes:

● Immediately following observation
● Objective – no opinions

Be immediate. Either take notes while you are watching the child, or take notes immediately after. If you wait until the end of the day or the next day to take your notes, you will forget important details. Your memory will be impacted by everything that happens in between the time you observe and the time you document. Remember, carrying sticky notes, a small note book or a tape recorder will be helpful.

Be objective. Do not venture opinions or try to explain why a child did or didn’t do something. Don’t say the child cried because mom left in a hurry. It’s enough to say that the child cried when mom left. Do not say the child was difficult or non-compliant: say that the child was unable to sit quietly at circle. And don’t say that it was because he stayed up too late last night. Your job is to report what you see, but not to explain it.
To Use Portfolios:

- Collect work samples
- Photos
- Sound /video recordings

Portfolios are another way to document children’s progress across the developmental domains. Portfolios may be envelopes, folders, boxes, or any other storage device that can hold samples or illustrations of children’s activities.

Samples can be drawings or paintings the child has made; poems, stories, words or letters the child has written, or stories that the child has dictated for someone else to write.

Pictures of the child engaged in an activity can speak volumes: A photo of the child putting the last block on top of a pile as tall as he is; or dressed up in the dramatic play area, or completing a 50 piece puzzle is worth a thousand words.

Audio recordings of the child telling a story, singing a song, or explaining where the ducks go in the winter are also wonderful descriptors.

As children get older, you can include them in deciding what work samples or illustrations go into the portfolio.

Remember: pictures and recordings of children can only be shared with parents or program staff. Any other use requires parent permission.
Using Portfolios

- Label everything with name, date, domain or reason for inclusion.

Be sure to include the child’s name and the date the sample was created on each piece of documentation in the portfolio. Also, note what developmental domain the work sample is illustrating, and why it was included. This will be important information when the time comes to share with parents.
Checklists are usually forms that list a number of skills that are typical for a child of a certain age. To be useful, they should include skills across all of the developmental domains (cognitive, social/emotional, language, small and gross motor, life skills). They should NOT be used to compare a child to other children his/her age, or to make screening or diagnostic decisions.
To Use Checklists:

- **Use research-based instruments** (like High-Scope, Work Sampling, Creative Curriculum, or Ages & Stages)

  OR...

One type of checklist is a research based tool that has been tested and normed, and is known to be a reliable and accurate indicator of children’s development when used as directed. There are many that are available for purchase, and may or may not require training to be properly implemented. Some examples are Ages and Stages Questionnaire, the Work Sampling System, the High Scope/ Child Observation Record, and the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum.
To Use Checklists:

- Use a program-tailored checklist that covers all developmental domains

Another option is a “home-made” checklist that is tailored to the nature of your program and the activities you provide. These program-specific checklists should NOT be used to compare a child to other children his/her age, or to make screening or diagnostic decisions.
What comes next?

Step 1:

• Consider what you have seen...
  • Changes
  • Growth
  • Strengths
  • Challenges

• After you have documented your observations and gathered your information, what comes next? First, take some time to think about all that you have observed. Do you have examples of the child’s performance in each domain? How has the child changed in recent months? In what domains do you see the most growth? In what areas does the child need the most support?
What comes next?
Step 2:

• Consider how you can help...
  • support emerging skills
  • challenge new development
  • encourage individual interests
    • New activities? New materials? New resources?

• Consider what activities you can plan to help a child who is struggling with a particular skill, or to challenge a child who has mastered the activities you currently have available. Consider what you can offer to encourage a child’s interest in a particular area. Are there additional materials or resources that you can provide, or are there new ways of using the materials you have to support the child’s development?
Plan how you will share the information you have gathered with the child’s parents. Be sure that you focus on the positive: what the child has accomplished, and what skills the child is beginning to develop, rather than talking about what the child cannot do. Think about how the parents will feel when they hear what you have to say. Put yourself in the parents’ shoes: How would you feel if the same things were said about your child? And remember that your written words are permanent and powerful; so write thoughtfully. Being professional means being honest, but kind in stating your observations.
Step 3 (continued):

• Plan how to share information:
  • summarize
  • avoid jargon
  • show progress
  • allow time for discussion

• You probably do not want to share your anecdotal notes, but may want to write a summary of how the child has changed.
• Be sure to avoid “jargon” or words that only educators will know and understand. Explain things in common, every-day words that parents are familiar with.
• If you have created a portfolio of the child’s work over time, it may be useful to draw direct comparisons between work samples at the beginning and at the end of the period so parents can see the difference.
• Make sure that you plan enough time for parents to ask questions and share their observations and concerns.
What comes next?

Step 4:

- Share information with parents and develop a plan to support the child and encourage development.

- Make sure you invite the parents to meet with you at a time that is convenient for them. If they are unable to meet with you, make sure they get a copy of the child’s progress report and give them a way to provide feedback. Ask them for their input in developing a plan for the child, and let them know your suggestions and plans for new and different activities to support and encourage their child’s development.
What comes next?
Step 5:

- Document your conversation / correspondence with parents and your plans for the child.

- Keep a copy with the progress report in the child’s file.

• After you have shared your observations with parents and obtained their input, let them know your plans for new and different activities to support and encourage their child’s development. Document your plans and your conversation or correspondence with parents, preferably with a follow-up letter. Remember to keep copies of your progress report, your plans and notes from your discussion with parents and your follow-up letter in the child’s file.
• Finally, implement your plans. Provide new materials, or offer new ways to use the materials you have. Make changes in your child care space, if necessary, to support your goals.
And then...
Get ready to start all over again!

• Begin observations for the next reporting period.
For additional information, see:

- **Progress Report Resource Packet** at [www.eec.state.ma.us](http://www.eec.state.ma.us), which includes information about:
  - how progress reports help educators learn about each child, plan activities to meet the child’s needs, and partner with parents;
  - how portfolios can be used to document children’s progress;
  - how to create progress reports for school age children;
  - positive ways to share information with parents about their children;
  - why observing developmental milestones is important;
  - internet resources for more information on commonly used assessment tools;
  - templates for sample progress report forms.

- **EEC’s Professional Development Calendar** for information about training opportunities, at [http://www.eec.state.ma.us/ProfessionalDevelopment/WebFindTraining.aspx](http://www.eec.state.ma.us/ProfessionalDevelopment/WebFindTraining.aspx)