Guidelines for Determining Approximate DALs from the *HELP® Strands*

Developmental Age Levels (DALs)

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Purpose:

These Guidelines (also referred to as the "Rules") were developed as a quick reference to help determine approximate developmental age levels (DALs) when assessing children with the *HELP Strands*. They are a supplement to ***Inside HELP***, the administration and reference manual for using the ***HELP Strands*** as a birth to three, curriculum-based assessment. The "Rules" provide a set of procedures and clarifications to enhance consistent reporting across staff and programs.

Reporting approximate DALs for individual Strands can assist in developing individualized intervention plans, and, in efforts to quantify and track progress of infants and toddlers at the Local, State, and Federal Level.

Development:

The "Rules" are considered an ongoing work in progress. They were included based upon need for clarification as identified by HELP inservice trainings, questions submitted the author of *HELP Strands*, and, from a detailed review of completed HELP Strands submitted by the field.

Important Notes:

1. HELP is a curriculum-based assessment process. *The "Rules"* cannot provide exact "scores" or age equivalents. Approximate DALs derived from the "Rules" are:

   - Considered approximate or estimated levels of development compared to the general birth-three population; and,

   - Best understood if shared with families and other team members within a framework of:
     - qualitative descriptions of the child's unique strengths and needs, and,
     - explanation that all children develop at varying rates, and,
     - understanding that any month levels reported are *approximate, not exact, and are for quantification purposes only.*

2. The term "Rules" is used in this document as a quick name for "General guidelines". "Rules" are really about what make sense for this child, at this time, to reflect this child's functioning. The "Rules" should not be rigid - they are guidelines!

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Guidelines for Determining Approximate DALs from the *HELP® Strands*

The "Rules"

Instructions:

1. The "Rules" are only applicable to the *HELP Strands*. They provide a guide to determine an approximate DAL for individual Strands within a Domain, e.g., Strand 1-1 'Development of Symbolic Play', which is a strand within the broader Cognitive domain.
2. The "Rules" should only be used by professionals who use *Inside HELP* with the *HELP Strands* within the context of the stated "Purpose" and "Important Notes" on page 1.
3. If you are viewing the "Rules" online, click the blue underlined example links to view samples of completed *HELP Strand*s that demonstrate the "rule".
4. Individual skill items must be credited and recorded correctly prior to determining approximate DALs for the Strands. Use the "Credit key", skill definitions, and credit criteria from *Inside HELP* and *HELP Strands* to insure proper recording and consistent and accurate skill crediting.
5. Sometimes a child may display persistent atypical or dysfunctional skills and behaviors that are not typical or appropriate at any age, e.g., pervasive repetitive behaviors, self destructive behavior, obligatory abnormal posturing. A description of these patterns is usually more appropriate to report than approximate DALs.

> ***Most important rule**:* Since each situation, circumstance, and child is unique, there will always be exceptions to the "rules"

"Rules"

1. **General rule - Plus, plus, minus, minus:**
   Report the last age range with a "+" credit after two consecutive "+" credits followed by two "–" credits, unless the Strand ends before two "- " can be observed. Link to example for "Rule" 1.
   Rationale: If a child displays two consecutive "+ +" (observed or reported) skills or behaviors in a strand *with good quality*, you can generally assume earlier skills have been achieved because of the hierarchical nature of the *Strands.*
   Exceptions & Clarifications:
   1.1 **This "Rule" does NOT apply to Strands 0.0 or 1-5**. Skills in these Strands are conceptually based and in consecutive age order, but are not hierarchical, i.e., one skill is not necessarily dependent upon the other. Use clinical judgment if assigning age levels for Strand 1-5. It is not appropriate to assign age levels to Strand 0-0; instead report descriptions of appropriate, hyper, or hypo reactions.
   1.2 If any skills or behaviors are credited with "A", you should check earlier skills.
   1.3 If something "just doesn't seem right", check earlier skills.
   1.4 If the child's chronological age (CA) falls within the final age range credited, report the child's CA, or OK, rather than the age range.

2. **Age gaps within a Strand.** Sometimes there is a several month gap between skills within a Strand. If so, and, if the child's CA is higher than the last skill credited "+", but lower than the highest age on the next skill, report approximate DAL as "OK", or as the child's CA.

Link to example for "Rule" 2: In Strand 1-4, an 18 month old child is credited with skill 1.67, at 12-15 mo., but not the next skill #1.98, listed as 18-22 mo. Record OK, *not* 12-15. *Rationale:* 15-18 mo. implies a delay. Typically developing children can develop skill 1.98 anytime between 18 to 22 months and this child is not yet 22 months .

3. **Add "A" atypical to, or in place of the Strand approximate DAL, whenever skills in a strand are recorded as "A" because of quality concerns.** This is very important to help insure that needs are identified regardless of DAL, appropriate interventions are planned, and, progress is measured. Criteria for "A" is listed for each applicable skill in *Inside HELP.*

   3.1 **If a child displays atypical behaviors for most skills in a Strand or behaviors that are not typical at any age for most items, do not assign an age range, only "A".**
   Link to example for "Rule" 3.1: In Strand 3-4, 'Weight-bearing in Standing', a 6 month old displays abnormal muscle tone & postures. Although he demonstrated some weight-bearing skills up to 6 months, he does so with abnormal patterns and postures. Record "A" for this strand rather than an approximate DAL. When writing reports or planning interventions describe child's motor patterns and needs rather than noting a DAL.

   3.2 **If only one or two skills in a Strand were assessed as "A", add "A" to the approximate DAL.**
   Link to example for "Rule" 3.2 In Strand 5-4, 'Learning Rules and Expectations', a 15 month old displayed skills and behaviors up to 15 months but a few are extreme. Record "15 A" for data collection or other quantification purpose, however, a report for planning and evaluation would say something like, *"Johnny displays many behaviors in this area that are typical for a child his age, however, some of his behavior is extreme and is interfering with daily activities for him and his family (list examples)"*.

   3.3 **Add "A" to the DAL for a Strand that assesses, "Left" and "Right" (e.g., left and right grasp or reach) when skills are observed on one side but not on the opposite side**.
   Link to example for "Rule" 3.3 10 month old child displays reaching skills up to 10 months but only using his left arm. For data entry or other quantification purposes Approximate DAL = 10 A. However, a curriculum planning and assessment report would say something like, "Johnny displays reaching skills (give examples) appropriate for age with his left arm, but he avoids or stiffens right arm"

4. **Always assess, and consider skills highlighted with an * (asterisk) when assigning an approximate DAL to a Strand,** even if the skill is far below the child's age. These are considered foundational lifetime core skills, and should always be evaluated regardless of age. If the skill is missing or atypical, record "A" for that skill, and add "A" to the approximate DAL assigned to the Strand.
   Link to example for "Rule" 4: Skill 5.04 "Establishes eye contact", under Strand 5-1 'Attachment/Separation/Autonomy': If the child rarely looks at people, record "A" for that item *and* add an "A" to the approximate DAL for Strand 5-1.

5. **Recording N/A.** Do not include individual skills/behaviors assessed as " **N/A"** in your computations to determine approximate developmental age level nor to measure progress.

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a. **"N/A" at the Skill level**:
   (1) **Some HELP Skills/behaviors are for anticipatory guidance only. For these skills and behaviors, mark "N/A" rather than "-".** These skills and "N/A" instructions are noted in the definition of applicable skills listed in the HELP Strands assessment booklet.
   Link to example for "Rule" 5a(1) Strand 3-2 'Supine', skill 3.35 "Raises hips …in supine".
   (2) **Since most skills within a Strand are in hierarchal order, skills build into more complex or difficult skills with age. Therefore, when applicable, if a child does not appropriately display an earlier skill, record "N/A" rather than "-"** so that it is not considered when determining an approximate DAL.
   Link to example for "Rule" 5a(2) Strand 1-4C, 'Cause and Effect': if child displays skill 1.50 "Guides action on toy manually", you can assume the child can accomplish prior skill 1.24 "Touches toy or adult hand to restart an activity". Therefore, if you do not the see the child do this, do not mark "-". Leave blank or record "N/A".

b. **"N/A" at the Strand level:** Record "N/A" for an entire Strand when the Strand is not appropriate to assess due to age, disability or circumstance. In these situations, do not consider the Strand when determining approximate DALs, but provide explanation.
   (1) Some areas of development may be inappropriate to assess due to a child's disability, e.g. Strand 1-6 A. "Picture Concepts" for a child who is blind, or "Advancing Postural Control and Motor Planning" skills for a child who is non-ambulatory. If however you are able to adapt skills in a Strand to accommodate a child's disability (see Strand Prefaces in *Inside HELP*), continue with determining approximate DAL and add a notation about the adaptation (see Rule 12)
   (2) Some areas of development may be inappropriate to assess due to a child's age or circumstance.

6. **Usually you do not need to consider isolated "-" credits when determining approximate DALs.** All skills are not necessary, appropriate, or relevant to all children. It is normal *not* to demonstrate all skills. Use clinical judgment when an isolated "-" should be considered.
   Link to example for "Rule" 6 Strand 1-7 A, 'Matching and Sorting': Although this child did not match black and white colors (skill 1.137) he demonstrated other matching and sorting skills. His mother reported that her child's toys are mostly primary colors. Skill 1.139, "Matches identical simple pictures", was marked "N/A" because it was not assessed since materials were not available, and, since this child displayed a higher level skills, i.e., "Can match similar pictures" (skill 1.145), per "Rule" 1.
   Exception: Skills marked with * (asterisk) are considered foundational core skills. They are **always** relevant and should always be assessed, per "Rule" 4.

7. **'Aging-out':** If the child is older than, but within a few months of, the age of the last skill in the strand (which the child displayed with good quality), record "OK" for the approximate DAL.
   Link to example for "Rule" 7 9 month old displays final skill in Strand 4-1 'Visual responses and tracking', which ends at 5-6 months. Record "OK" rather than 5-6 mo. for this strand since that could imply a delay in visual tracking.

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8. **If the last skill credited "+" in a Strand has an age range that includes the child's age, record "OK" rather than reporting the skill's age range.**
   Link to examples for "Rule" 8, example 1, example 2

9. **If the child's age (e.g., 14 mo.) is less than the last skill credited with a "+" in a Strand (e.g., 18-24 mo), report the lowest of the highest age in the range for the approximate DAL, (e.g., 18 mo. for data recording purposes).**
   Link to example for "Rule" 9

10. **If the age range of the last skill accomplished for a child in a strand is greater than the age range of the next skill** in the strand (that the child could not accomplish), do not report the child's DAL as the full age range listed for the last skill accomplished. Link to view example for "Rule" 10 If the child is 12 mo. and the highest skill accomplished in Strand 1-4B. 'Means-ends' is 1.26 "Works for desired, out of reach object" that has an age range of 5-9 months, and, the next skill in the Strand (which the child did NOT accomplish), 1.40 "Retains two of three objects" has age range of 6.5-7.5, the approximate DAL for this child would be about 5-7 mo. rather than 5-9 mo.

11. **It is not appropriate to determine an approximate DAL for Section 0.0 - Regulatory/Sensory Organization**. The purpose of this section is to look for patterns of preferences, capacities, and difficulties related to regulatory and sensory organization issues. Instead of determining DALs, child responses can be described as "Typical," "Over-reactive" or "Under-reactive."

12. **When you adapt skills in a Strand to accommodate a child's disability or** other special needs determine the approximate DAL with adaptations and add a notation or description to qualify the credit and help plan interventions. Suggested adaptations are available for each Strand Preface in ***Inside HELP:***

Assessment Adaptations

➔The "Rules" are an extension of ***Inside HELP****'s* 'Assessment Notes' included in each *Strand Preface* and, 'Instructions', pages 1.23-i.26**.** They are considered an ongoing work in progress.

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