Virtual Lab School

Getting Started with the VLS

July 15, 2026

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To Support Your Learning...

- All participants have been muted
- Please type questions or comments into the CHAT
- We will watch the CHAT and answer questions throughout the training
- This session is being recorded and will be made available on the Virtual Lab School site
- We encourage you to take part in the interactive components throughout the training
- If you have any feedback, you will have an opportunity to share your thoughts after the training
- If we disconnect—please log back in.

Learning Objectives

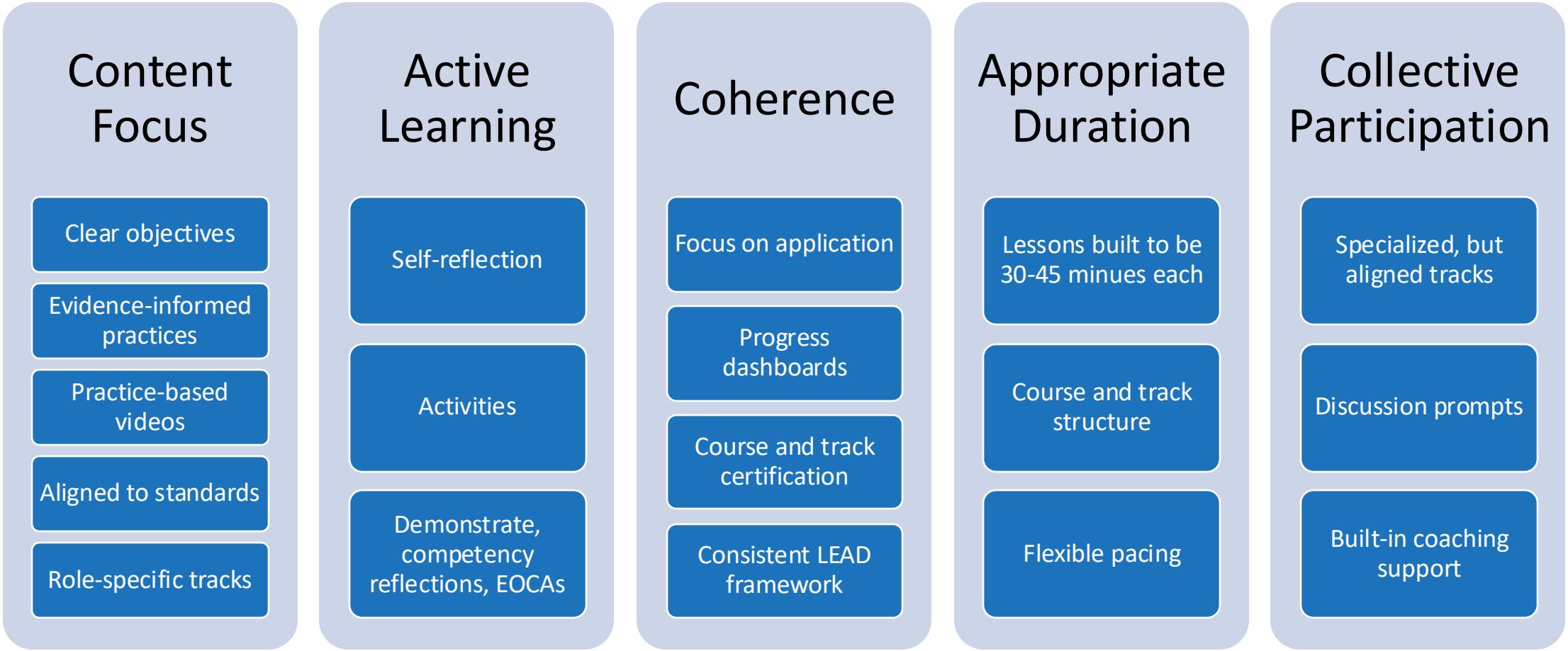
- Identify the essential elements of VLS content and how the system is structured to support adult learners
- Explore strategies for orienting new CYP professionals to the VLS
- Discuss key ways for T&CS to engage and support professionals throughout their foundational coursework and beyond
- Highlight VLS tools and resources that can assist professionals as they navigate the system

The VLS: What is it?

The Virtual Lab School (VLS) is an online professional development system designed to empower child and youth professionals with knowledge and skills to enhance their practice.

- ✓ Competency-based professional development system
- ✓ Developed specifically to support military CYPs
- ✓ Leverages and translates research and relevant standards in multiple areas

Effective Professional Development



Allen & Kelly, 2015; Desimone, 2009; Administration for Child and Families, 2015; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Kraft et al., 2018; Schachter et al., 2025; Schachter et al., 2019; Sheridan et al., 2009

A key reason we've built the direct care tracks to intentionally include coaching...

Joyce & Showers, 2002; Kraft et al., 2018; Schachter et al., 2025;
See more about the science of coaching in our previous Live Leadership Webinar: Coaching to Enhance Practice

VLS Foundational Tracks

- Program Leaders
  - Management
  - Training & Curriculum Specialist
- Center-Based Direct Care Professionals
  - Infant Toddler (birth to 3 years)
  - Preschool (3 to 5 years)
  - School-Age (5 to 12 years)
  - Coming soon: Youth (12 to 18 years)
- Home-Based Professionals
  - Family Child Care (birth to 12 years)

Foundational Training

- ☑ Safe Environments
- ☑ Healthy Environments
- ☑ Learning Environments
- ☑ Physical Development
- ☑ Cognitive Development
- ☑ Communication & Language Development
- ☑ Creative Expression
- ☑ Self & Cultural Understanding
- ☑ Social & Emotional Development
- ☑ Positive Guidance
- ☑ Family Engagement
- ☑ Program Management
- ☑ Professionalism
- ☑ Child Abuse: Identification & Reporting
- ☑ Child Abuse: Prevention

Scaffolds learning for new and advanced professionals.

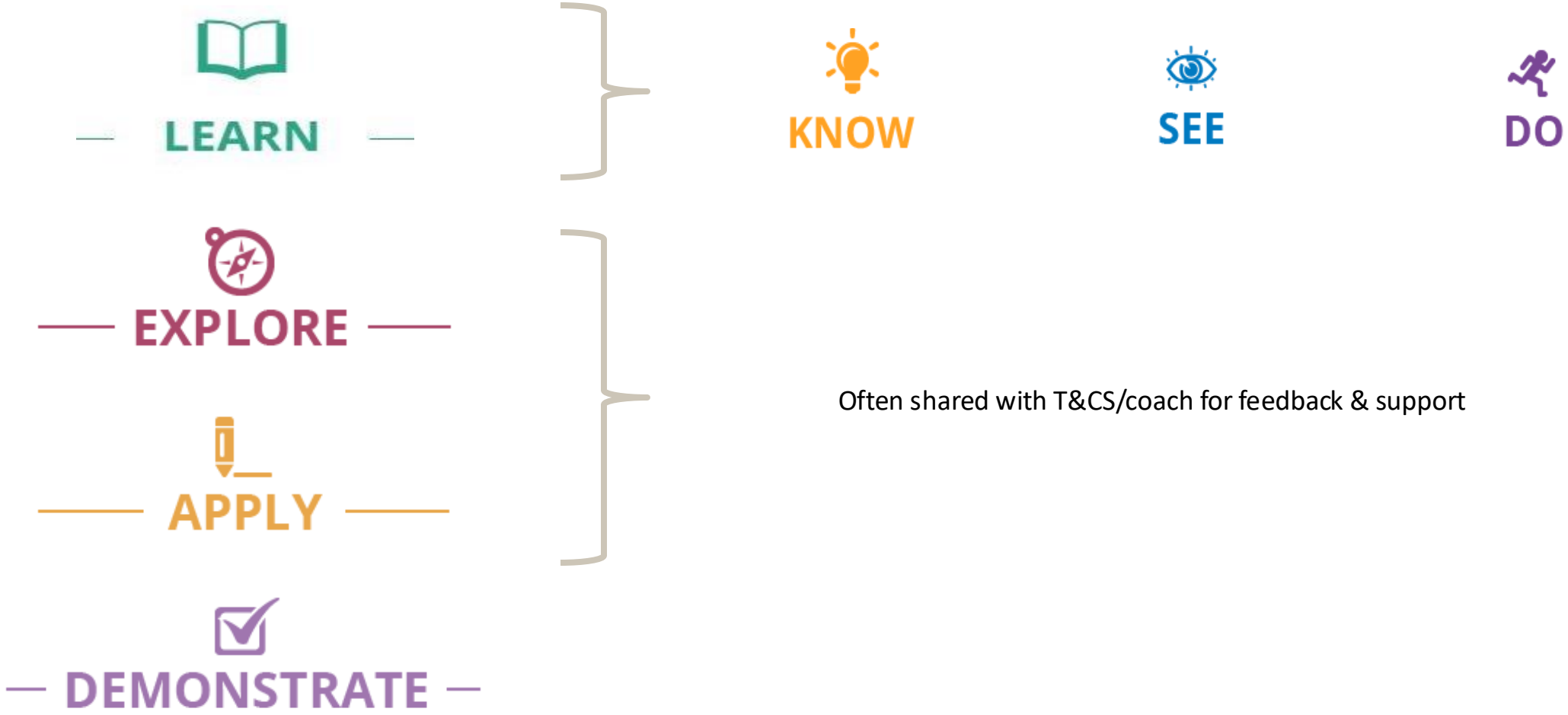
Combines research on child development, effective teaching practices, and principles of adult learning.

Highlights developmentally appropriate, inclusive, & family focused approaches.

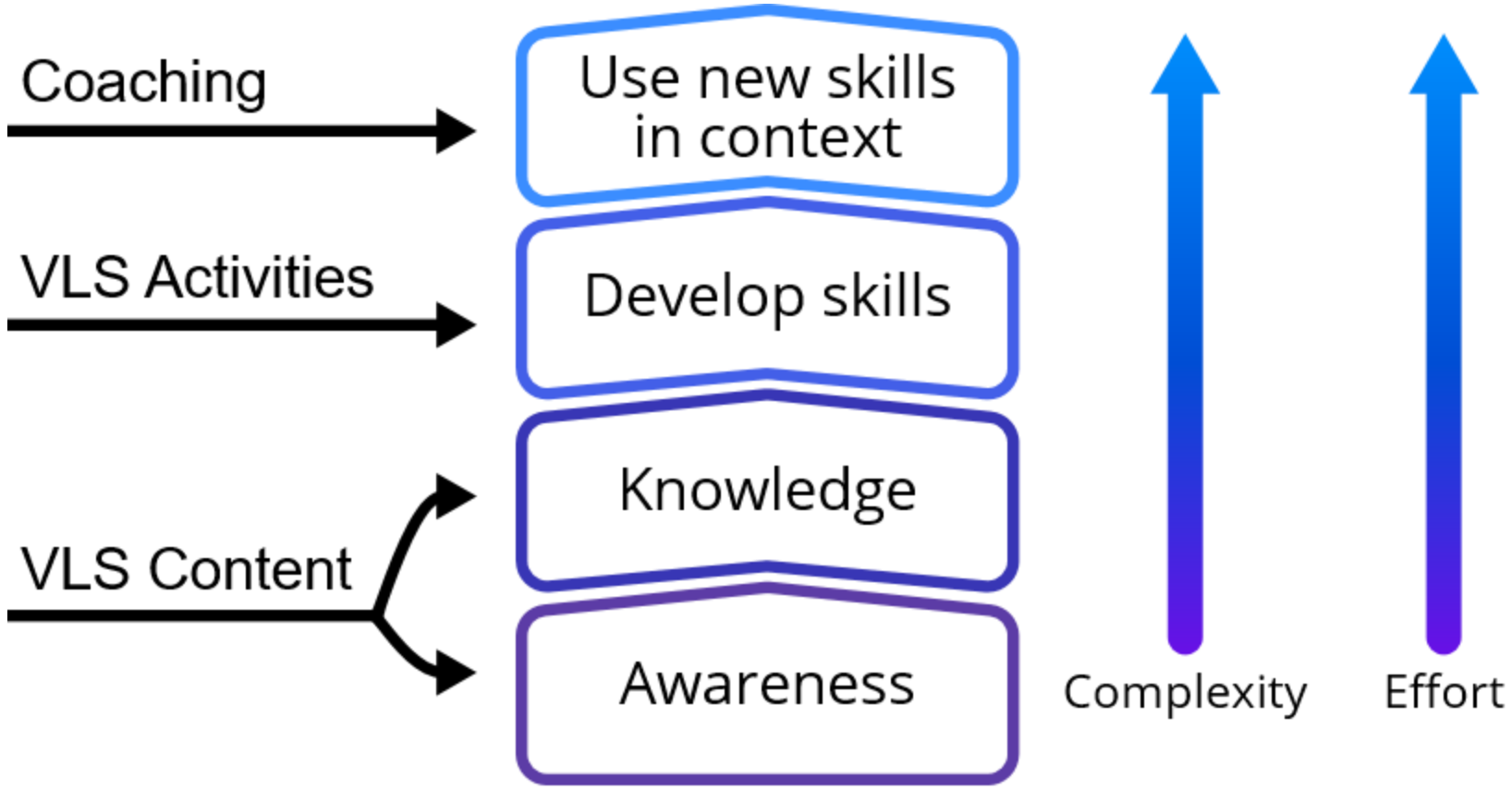
Emphasizes practice-based coaching, self-reflection, and application of knowledge and skills.

Showcases expert interviews and in-program video footage demonstrating best practices.

LEAD: Consistent Evidence-Informed Lesson Framework



Building Professional Awareness, Knowledge, Skills, and Use in Context



Adapted from PBC Leadership Academy (2016)

Elements of a Competency-Based System

COMPETENCY REFLECTIONS

END OF COURSE ASSESSMENT

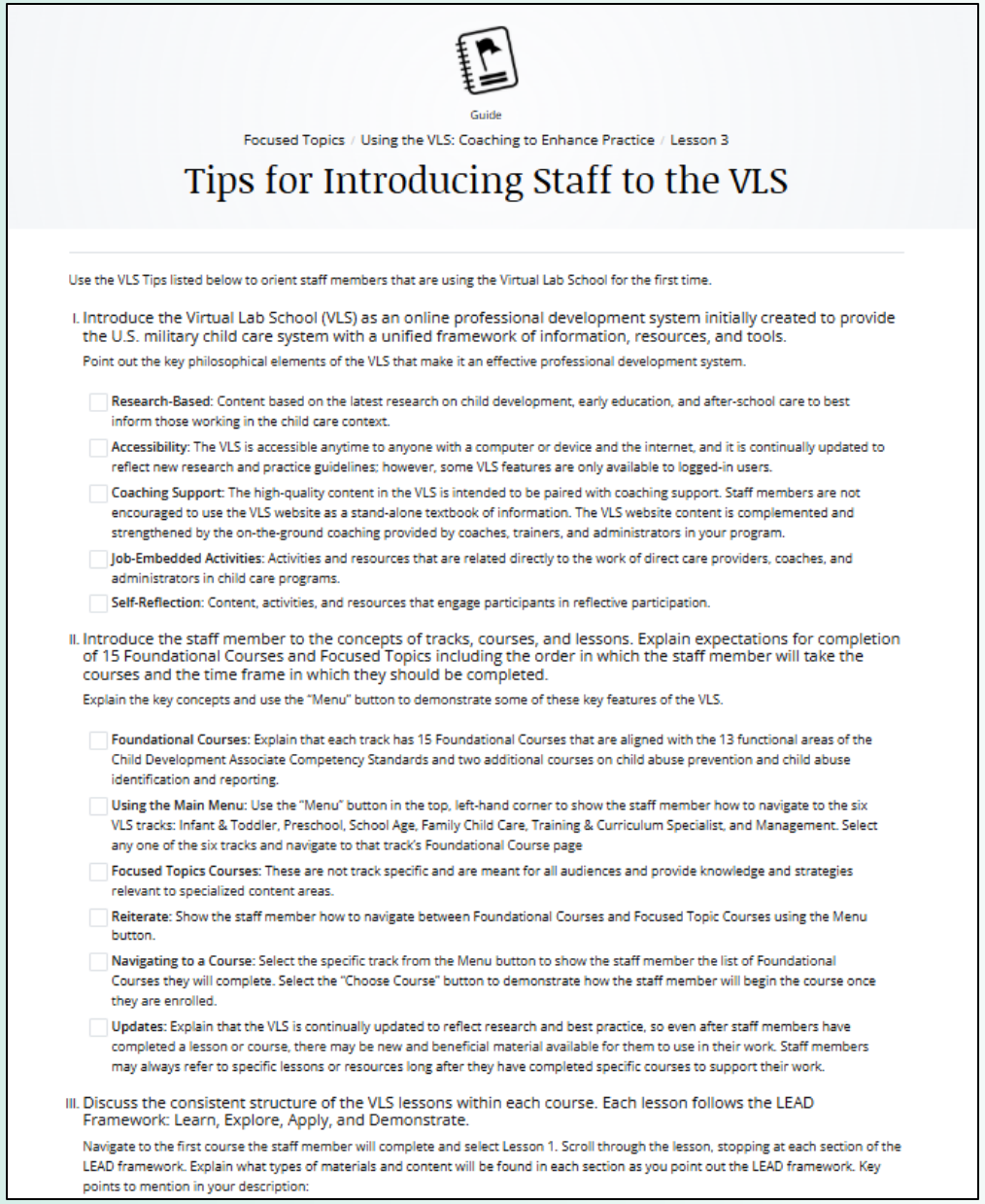
Specialized Training

VLS professional development offerings include focused, targeted content tailored to a wide range of roles, program settings, and training requirements.

- **Focused Topics:** Specialized courses that deepen knowledge on complex subjects and build on foundational training to better support all children, families, and role-specific needs.
- **Targeted Professional Developments:** Brief, research-informed modules (0.5–1.5 hours) that meet annual requirements and support role-specific professional growth.
- **Recorded Webinars:** Hour-long recorded webinars for program leaders focused on strengthening leadership practices on key topics.
- **Supplemental Trainings:** Practical trainings, tools, and resources that aid implementation of high-quality, evidence-informed child and youth practices.

Orienting Professionals to the VLS

- ✓ Get to know the learner
- ✓ Introduce professional to the VLS framework and technical aspects
- ✓ Demonstrate key features
- ✓ Share what to expect in their learning journey
- ✓ Discuss expectations for course completion



Guide

Focused Topics / Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice / Lesson 3

Tips for Introducing Staff to the VLS

Use the VLS Tips listed below to orient staff members that are using the Virtual Lab School for the first time.

I. Introduce the Virtual Lab School (VLS) as an online professional development system initially created to provide the U.S. military child care system with a unified framework of information, resources, and tools.

Point out the key philosophical elements of the VLS that make it an effective professional development system.

- **Research-Based**: Content based on the latest research on child development, early education, and after-school care to best inform those working in the child care context.
- **Accessibility**: The VLS is accessible anytime to anyone with a computer or device and the internet, and it is continually updated to reflect new research and practice guidelines; however, some VLS features are only available to logged-in users.
- **Coaching Support**: The high-quality content in the VLS is intended to be paired with coaching support. Staff members are not encouraged to use the VLS website as a stand-alone textbook of information. The VLS website content is complemented and strengthened by the on-the-ground coaching provided by coaches, trainers, and administrators in your program.
- **Job-Embedded Activities**: Activities and resources that are related directly to the work of direct care providers, coaches, and administrators in child care programs.
- **Self-Reflection**: Content, activities, and resources that engage participants in reflective participation.

II. Introduce the staff member to the concepts of tracks, courses, and lessons. Explain expectations for completion of 15 Foundational Courses and Focused Topics including the order in which the staff member will take the courses and the time frame in which they should be completed.

Explain the key concepts and use the "Menu" button to demonstrate some of these key features of the VLS.

- **Foundational Courses**: Explain that each track has 15 Foundational Courses that are aligned with the 13 functional areas of the Child Development Associate Competency Standards and two additional courses on child abuse prevention and child abuse identification and reporting.
- **Using the Main Menu**: Use the "Menu" button in the top, left-hand corner to show the staff member how to navigate to the six VLS tracks: Infant & Toddler, Preschool, School Age, Family Child Care, Training & Curriculum Specialist, and Management. Select any one of the six tracks and navigate to that track's Foundational Course page
- **Focused Topics Courses**: These are not track specific and are meant for all audiences and provide knowledge and strategies relevant to specialized content areas.
- **Reiterate**: Show the staff member how to navigate between Foundational Courses and Focused Topic Courses using the Menu button.
- **Navigating to a Course**: Select the specific track from the Menu button to show the staff member the list of Foundational Courses they will complete. Select the "Choose Course" button to demonstrate how the staff member will begin the course once they are enrolled.
- **Updates**: Explain that the VLS is continually updated to reflect research and best practice, so even after staff members have completed a lesson or course, there may be new and beneficial material available for them to use in their work. Staff members may always refer to specific lessons or resources long after they have completed specific courses to support their work.

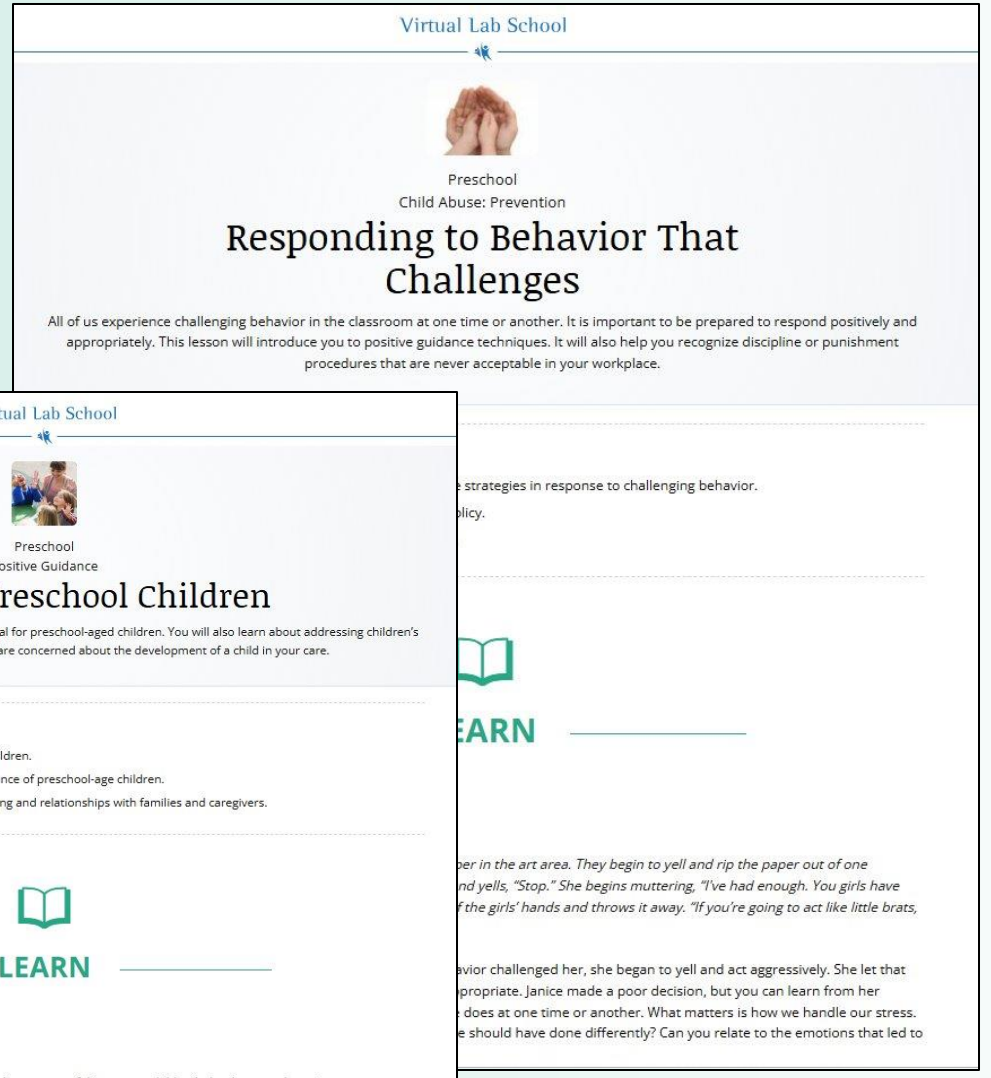
III. Discuss the consistent structure of the VLS lessons within each course. Each lesson follows the LEAD Framework: Learn, Explore, Apply, and Demonstrate.

Navigate to the first course the staff member will complete and select Lesson 1. Scroll through the lesson, stopping at each section of the LEAD framework. Explain what types of materials and content will be found in each section as you point out the LEAD framework. Key points to mention in your description:

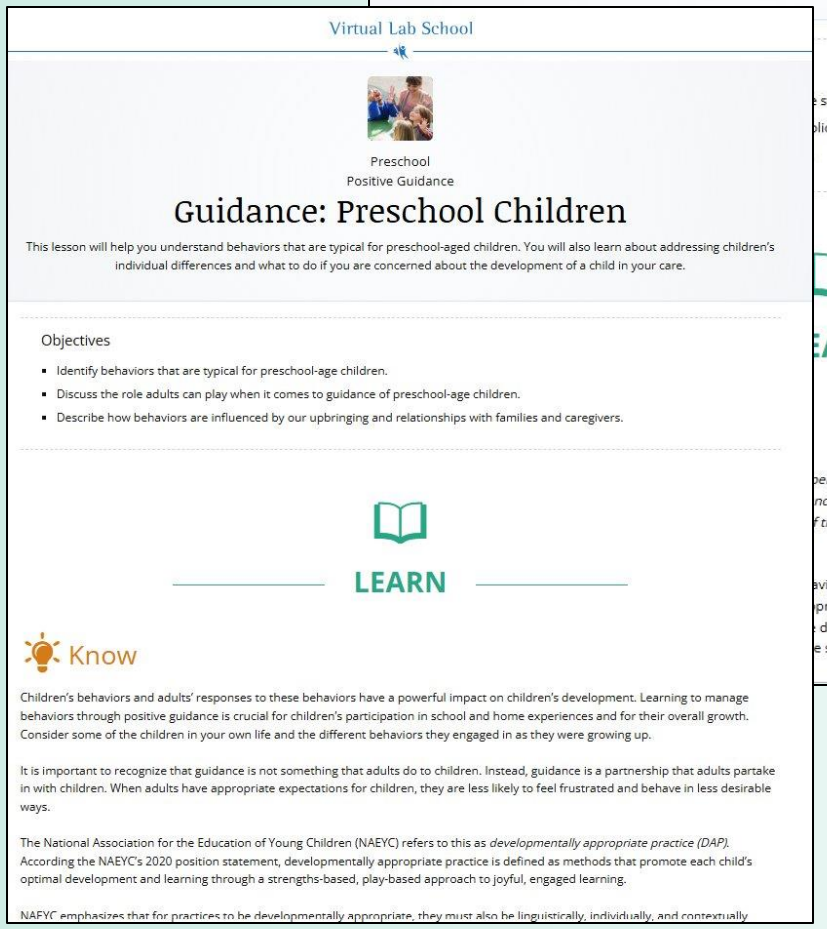
FT, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 3

What to Expect on this Learning Journey

- Active engagement with course material and coach
- Natural reconnection with key ideas



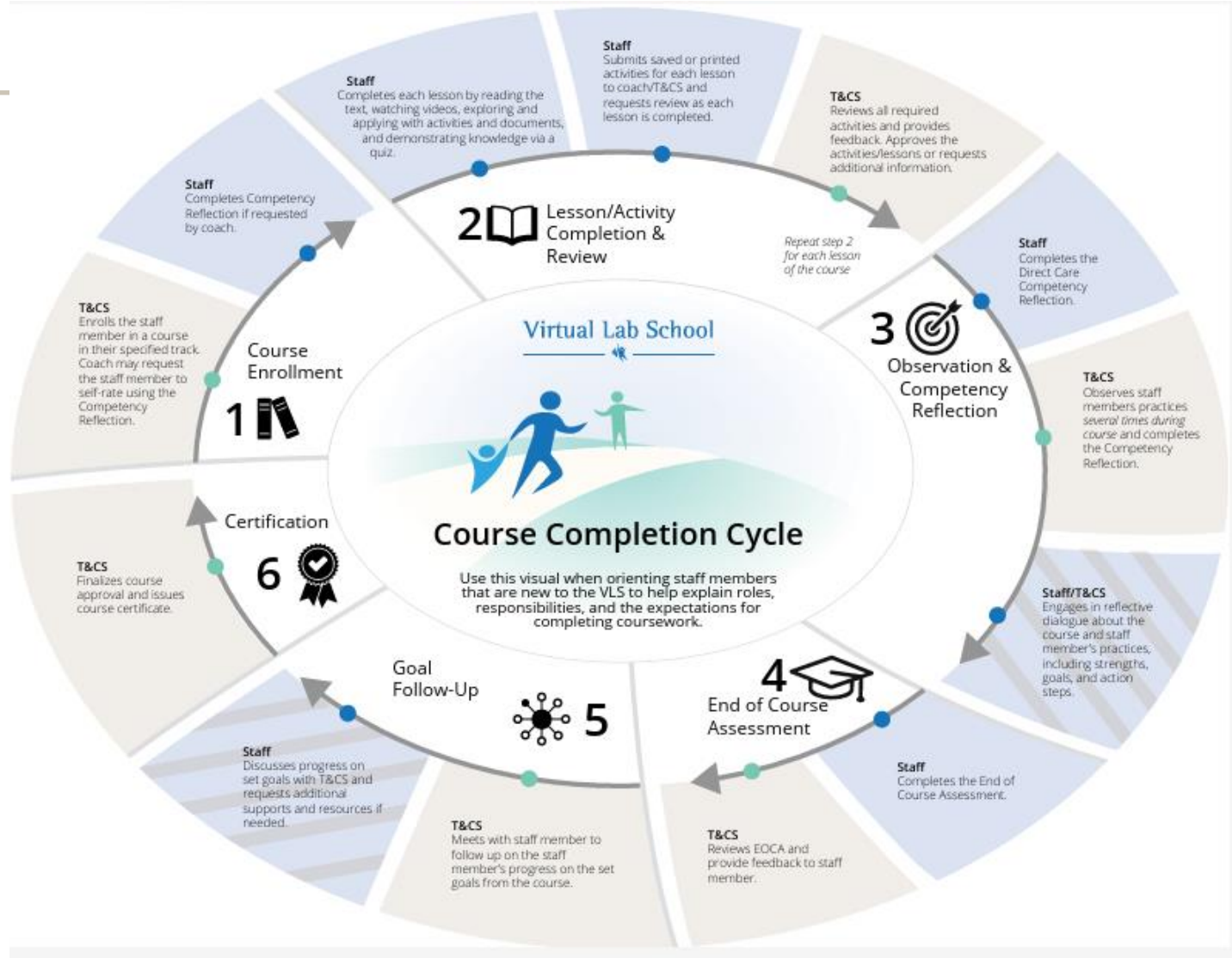
Preschool, Child Abuse: Prevention, Lesson 4



Preschool, Positive Guidance, Lesson 2

Expectations for Course Completion

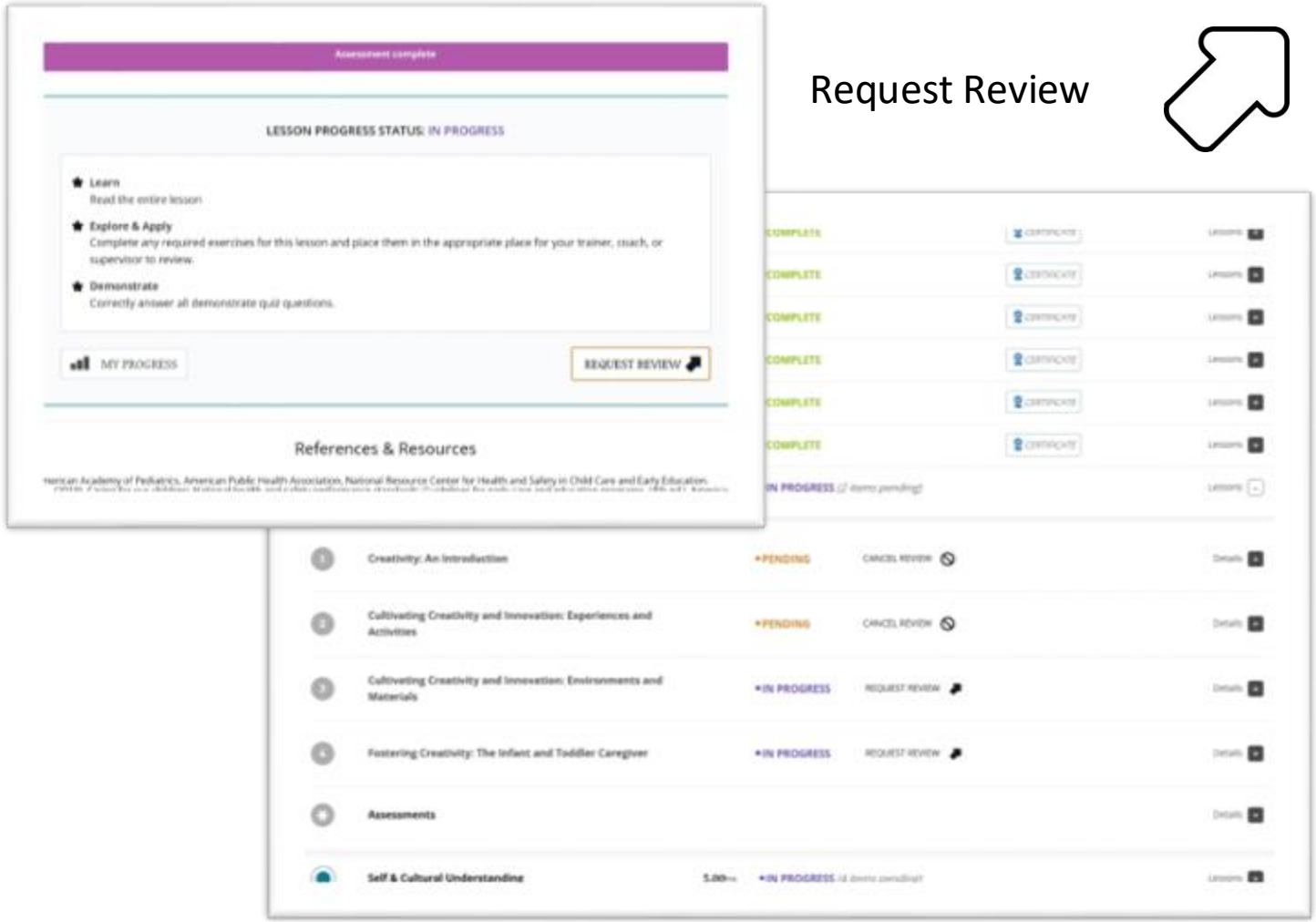
- ❑ Read the lesson and complete the required activities
- ❑ Complete the demonstrate questions
- ❑ Submit activities to coach and request review
- ❑ Self-reflect using the Competency Reflection
- ❑ Complete the End of Course Assessment
- ❑ Participate in coaching conversation



Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 3

Best Practices for Submitting Activities

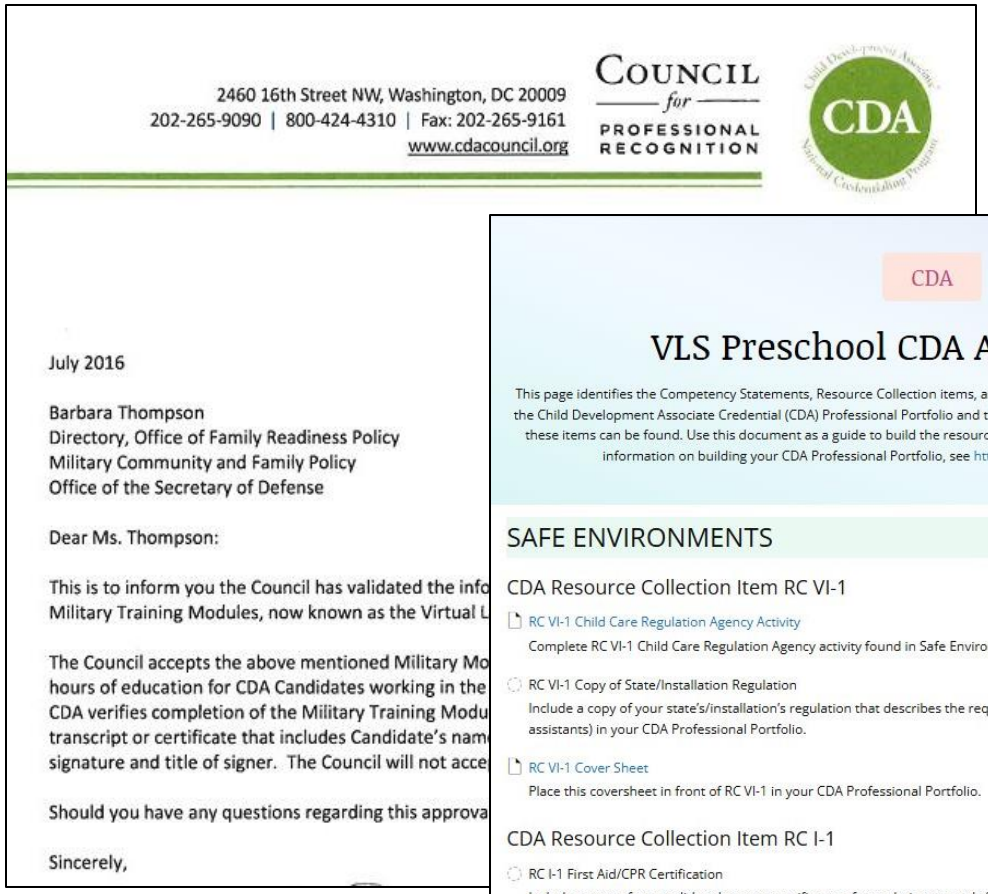
- Help staff to know the best way to share activities
  - Email, shared folder, print
  - Request Review
  - Number of activities to submit at a time
- How will you share feedback?



Expectations for Track Completion

- Share the course order the professional will follow
- Communicate Service-level policy related to timeline
- Discuss how progression through the foundational training connects to their promotions

Using the VLS for a CDA Credential



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www.cdacouncil.org

COUNCIL for PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

CDA

July 2016

Barbara Thompson
Directory, Office of Family Readiness Policy
Military Community and Family Policy
Office of the Secretary of Defense

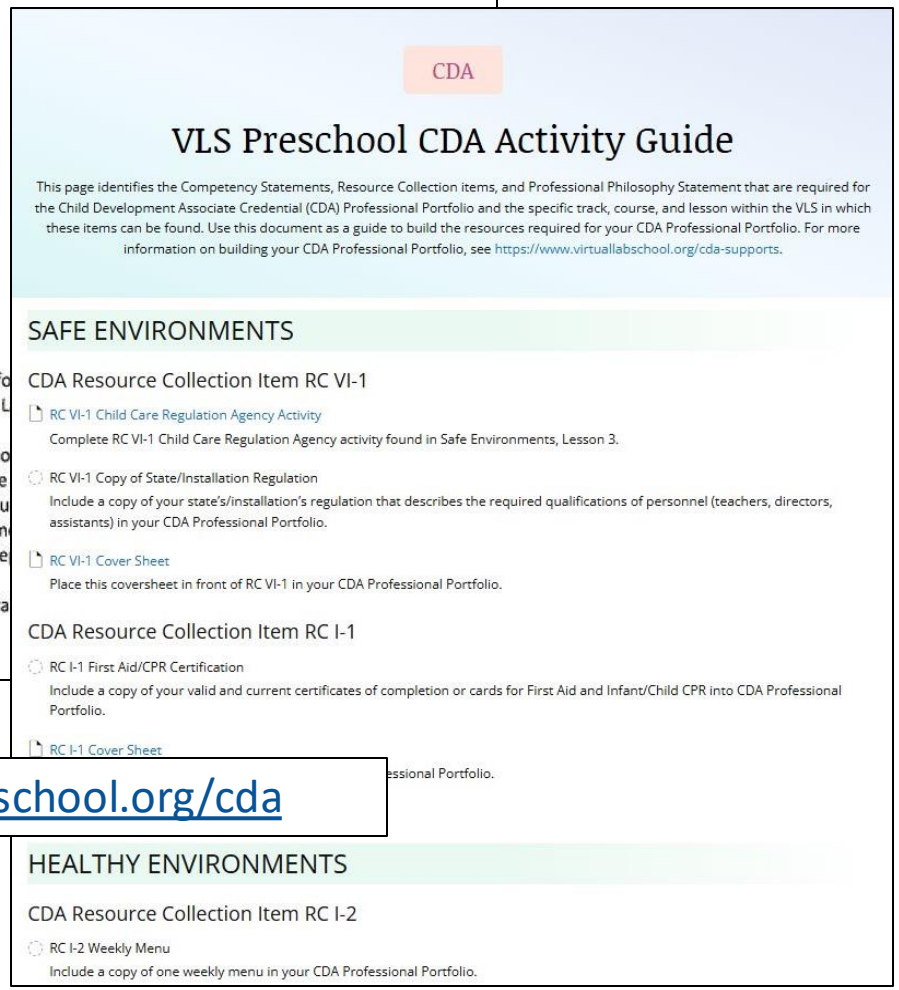
Dear Ms. Thompson:

This is to inform you the Council has validated the info
Military Training Modules, now known as the Virtual L

The Council accepts the above mentioned Military Mo
hours of education for CDA Candidates working in the
CDA verifies completion of the Military Training Modu
transcript or certificate that includes Candidate's nam
signature and title of signer. The Council will not acce

Should you have any questions regarding this approva

Sincerely,



CDA

VLS Preschool CDA Activity Guide

This page identifies the Competency Statements, Resource Collection items, and Professional Philosophy Statement that are required for the Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) Professional Portfolio and the specific track, course, and lesson within the VLS in which these items can be found. Use this document as a guide to build the resources required for your CDA Professional Portfolio. For more information on building your CDA Professional Portfolio, see https://www.virtuallabschool.org/cda-supports.

SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

CDA Resource Collection Item RC VI-1

RC VI-1 Child Care Regulation Agency Activity
Complete RC VI-1 Child Care Regulation Agency activity found in Safe Environments, Lesson 3.

RC VI-1 Copy of State/Installation Regulation
Include a copy of your state's/installation's regulation that describes the required qualifications of personnel (teachers, directors, assistants) in your CDA Professional Portfolio.

RC VI-1 Cover Sheet
Place this coversheet in front of RC VI-1 in your CDA Professional Portfolio.

CDA Resource Collection Item RC I-1

RC I-1 First Aid/CPR Certification
Include a copy of your valid and current certificates of completion or cards for First Aid and Infant/Child CPR into CDA Professional Portfolio.

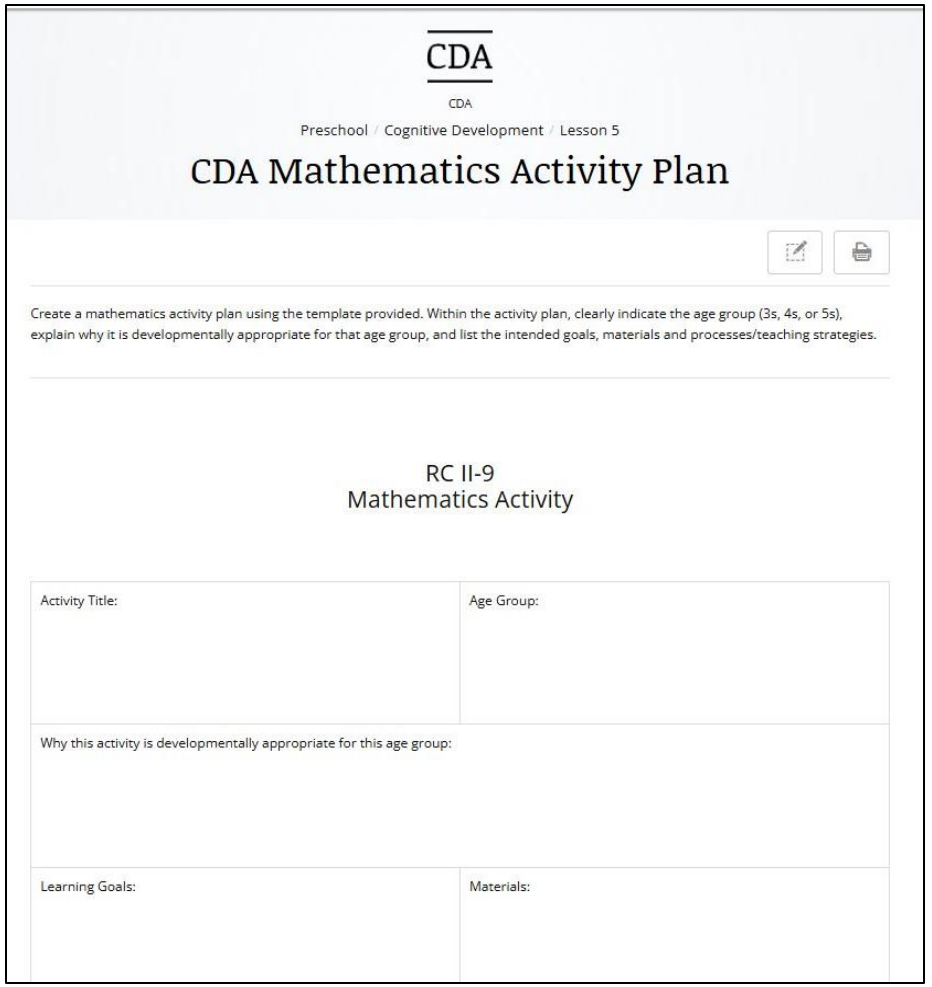
RC I-1 Cover Sheet
...essional Portfolio.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

CDA Resource Collection Item RC I-2

RC I-2 Weekly Menu
Include a copy of one weekly menu in your CDA Professional Portfolio.

https://www.virtuallabschool.org/cda



CDA

CDA

Preschool / Cognitive Development / Lesson 5

CDA Mathematics Activity Plan

Create a mathematics activity plan using the template provided. Within the activity plan, clearly indicate the age group (3s, 4s, or 5s), explain why it is developmentally appropriate for that age group, and list the intended goals, materials and processes/teaching strategies.

RC II-9
Mathematics Activity

Activity Title:	Age Group:
Why this activity is developmentally appropriate for this age group:	
Learning Goals:	Materials:

Engaging with Professionals Throughout their Coursework

Your role in the coaching partnership includes:

- Adding users & enrolling professionals in courses
- Reviewing activities
- Administering & reviewing EOCA
- Observing using Competency Reflection
- Providing Feedback
- Co-constructing practice-based goals

Program Tool

Focused Topics / Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice / Lesson 3

Coach-Staff Member Agreement

Share this agreement with each staff member that you work with. Review each statement, sign your name, and present this agreement to your staff. Discuss any questions that staff members have about this agreement. Keep a signed copy of this document for your records. Use the spaces provided to add any additional items to this agreement.

As a coach, I will:

- Commit to supporting the various needs of staff in my program, including your unique needs
- Focus on your strengths
- Recognize your professional growth and value small strides toward progress
- Demonstrate flexibility, and understand that individuals learn at different paces and in different ways
- Build your capacity for self-initiated learning and problem-solving
- See things from others' perspectives
- "Roll-up my sleeves" and offer to model discussed practices
- Review and give feedback on coursework in a timely manner
- Follow through with commitments and timelines
- Recognize when your questions or needs are beyond my scope of knowledge and practice and find someone who can help
- Ask for and give objective feedback
- Keep information about you and other staff members confidential and only discuss performance with the program administrator when necessary
- Engage in honest self-reflection about my coaching skills and helpfulness to others
- Respect your beliefs and ideas

As a staff member or family child care provider, I will:

- Evaluate my own professional strengths and needs
- Be open to the perspectives of others
- Become aware of strategies that help me learn (e.g., handwritten notes)
- Speak up if I don't understand something or feel a request is unrealistic
- Engage in collaborative problem-solving with my coach
- Engage in honest self-reflection about my beliefs, knowledge, and practices
- Follow-through with discussed actions steps and complete coursework in a timely manner
- Learn new information and skills at all stages my career
- Commit to quality care for children and overall program quality
- Try new practices, even if they are outside of my comfort zone
- Ask for and give objective feedback
- Respect my coach, even if they have fewer years of experience or are younger than me

Sign and Date:	
Staff Member:	
Coach:	

FT, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 3, Apply

Program Tool

Focused Topics / Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice / Lesson 1

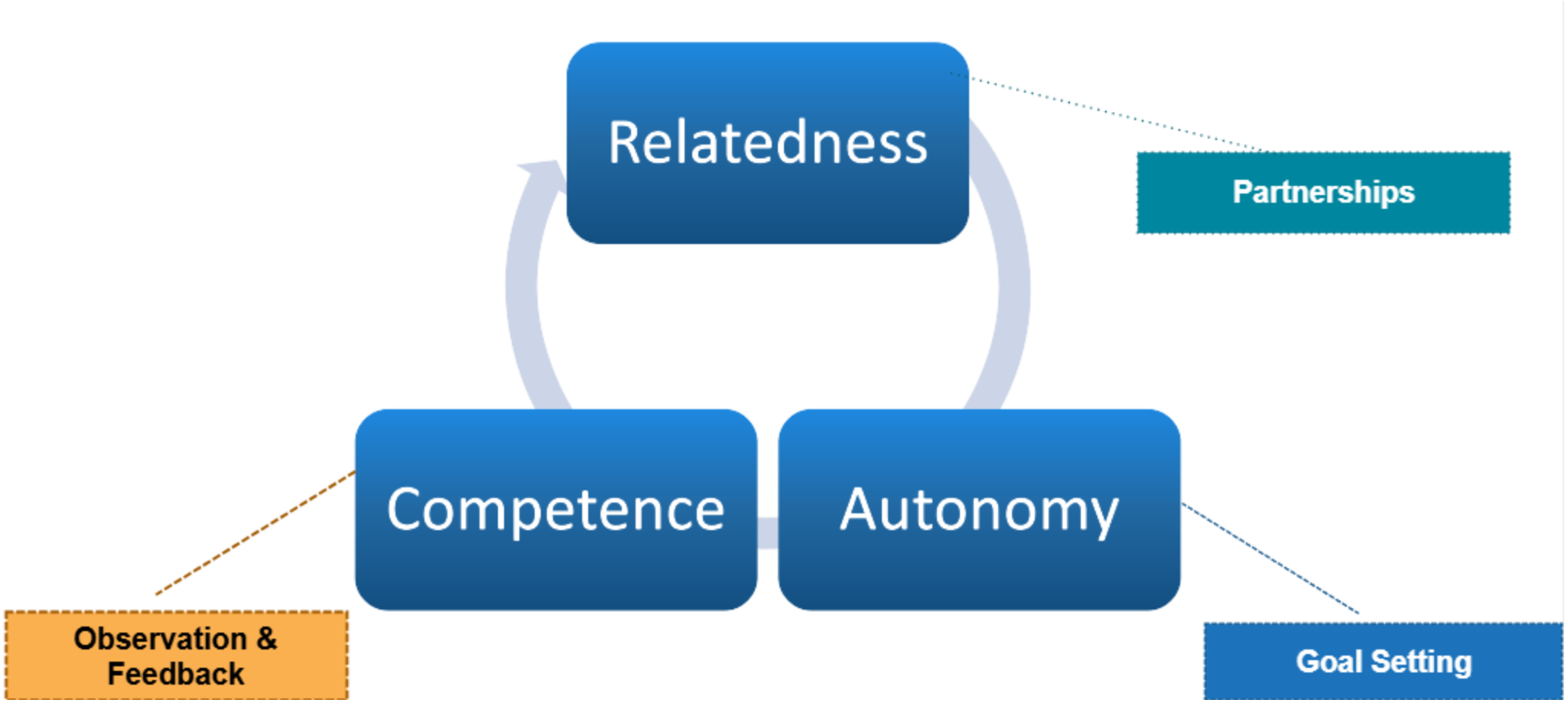
Virtual Lab School Technical Checklist for Coaches

Complete the following self-assessment on essential VLS technical tasks. If you are not confident or somewhat confident for any of the tasks, please take the time to review the content from this lesson and the VLS Support Articles.

Task	Not Confident	Somewhat Confident	Confident
I am familiar with the LEAD framework and know what each letter stands for.			
I know how to tell if an activity is required or not required.			
I know where to find updates on content and technical aspects of the VLS and highlighted research from the field.			
I can tell if I am logged in to the VLS.			
I know what to do if I forget my password or if a direct care user needs help resetting a password.			
For staff who have never had a VLS account before, I know how to create a new user.			
For staff who have had a VLS account in the past, I know how to transfer or reactivate an account so I can add them to my Staff Roster page.			
I know how to edit a staff member's position title, name, and email address for an account.			
I know how to change the role or track of a direct care user if they transition from an infant room to a preschool room, for example.			
I know the next step to take if I receive a banner message stating that my account creation abilities have been temporarily revoked.			
I know how to enroll direct care users in specific courses.			
I know how to approve direct care users' completed lessons and certify completed courses.			

FT, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 1, Apply

Coaching: Philosophy with Feet



Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017

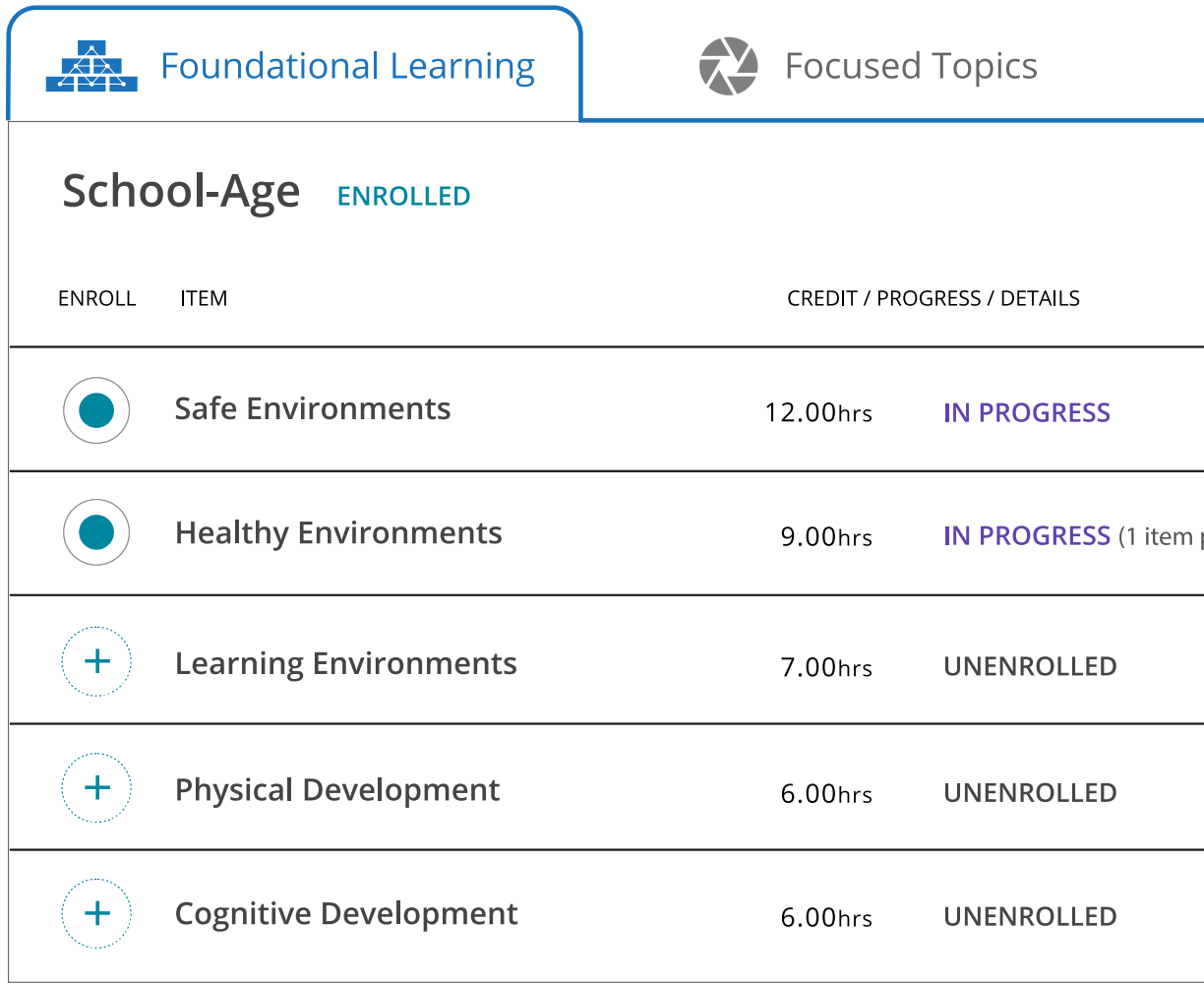
Best Practices for Implementation

Adding New Users & Deactivating Accounts

- Best practices and why this is important
  - Check to see if they already have a VLS account
  - Have staff email from the email they would like their VLS account associated with to ensure email is active and correct
  - Recommend using a personal email account versus a government or military account
  - Deactivate accounts when a professional leaves your program
  - Update email before deactivating accounts

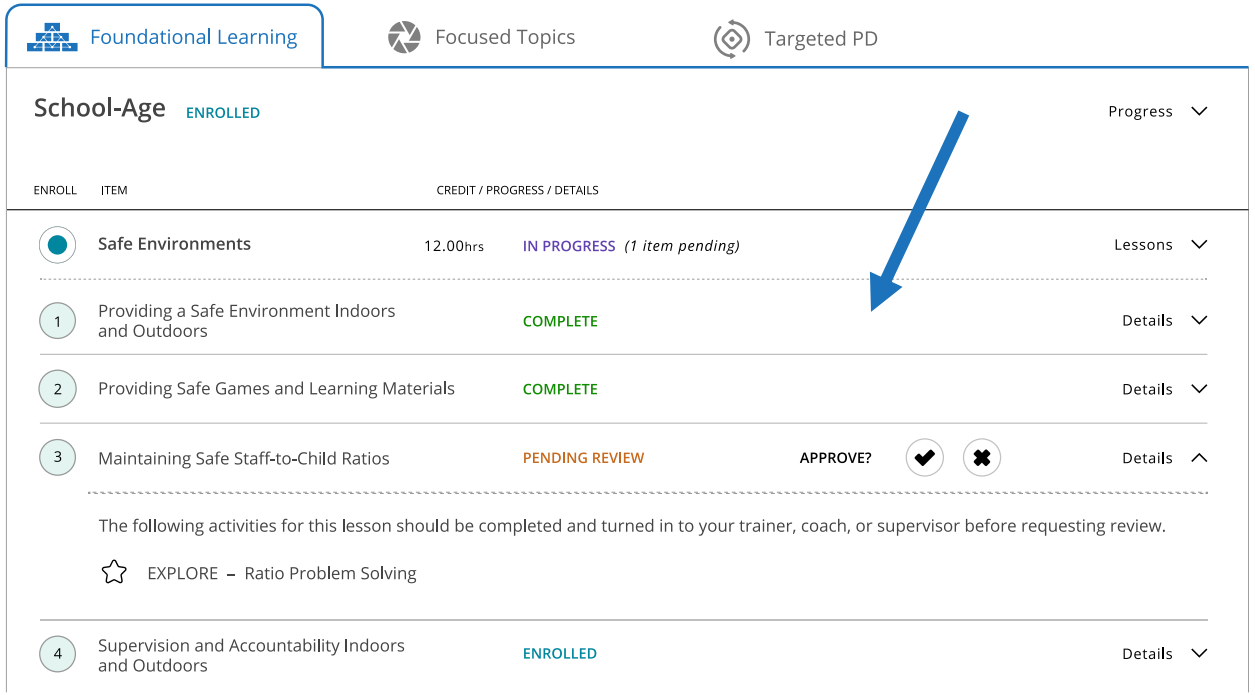
Enrolling Professionals in Courses

- Intentionally built so that you are enrolling staff in courses so that you can help scaffold the right pace
- How many courses to enroll in at one time



Reviewing Completed Activities

- Using your knowledge of DAP and suggested answers
- Timely feedback to support growth
- Supportive and constructive feedback
- Documentation of activities

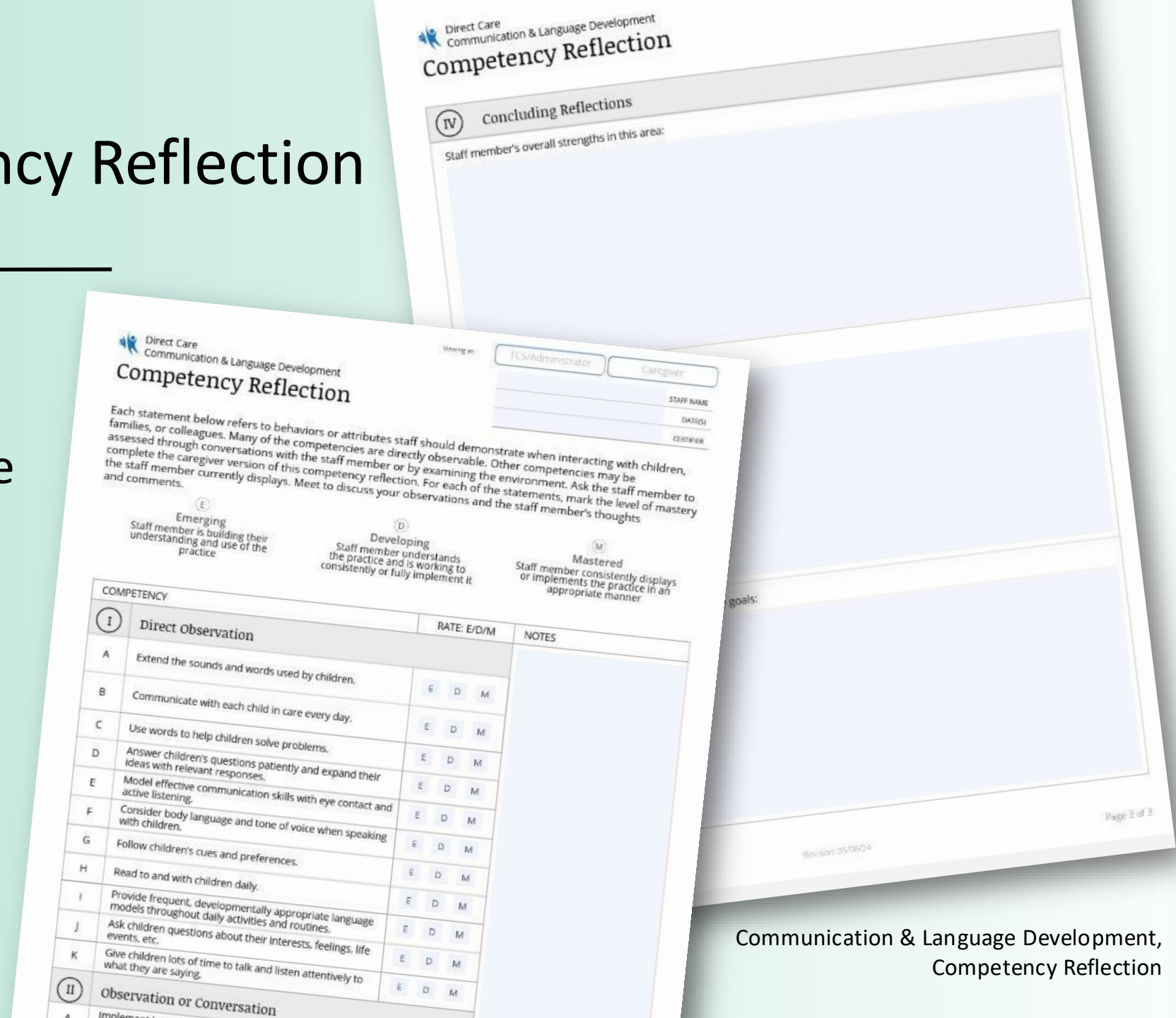


Administering the End of Course Assessment

- Offline component required for course completion
- Intentional framing to support learner understanding & success
- Suggested answer guidance available for coaches
- Service-specific considerations to ensure relevance & accuracy
- Ensure proper documentation and record keeping

Using the Competency Reflection

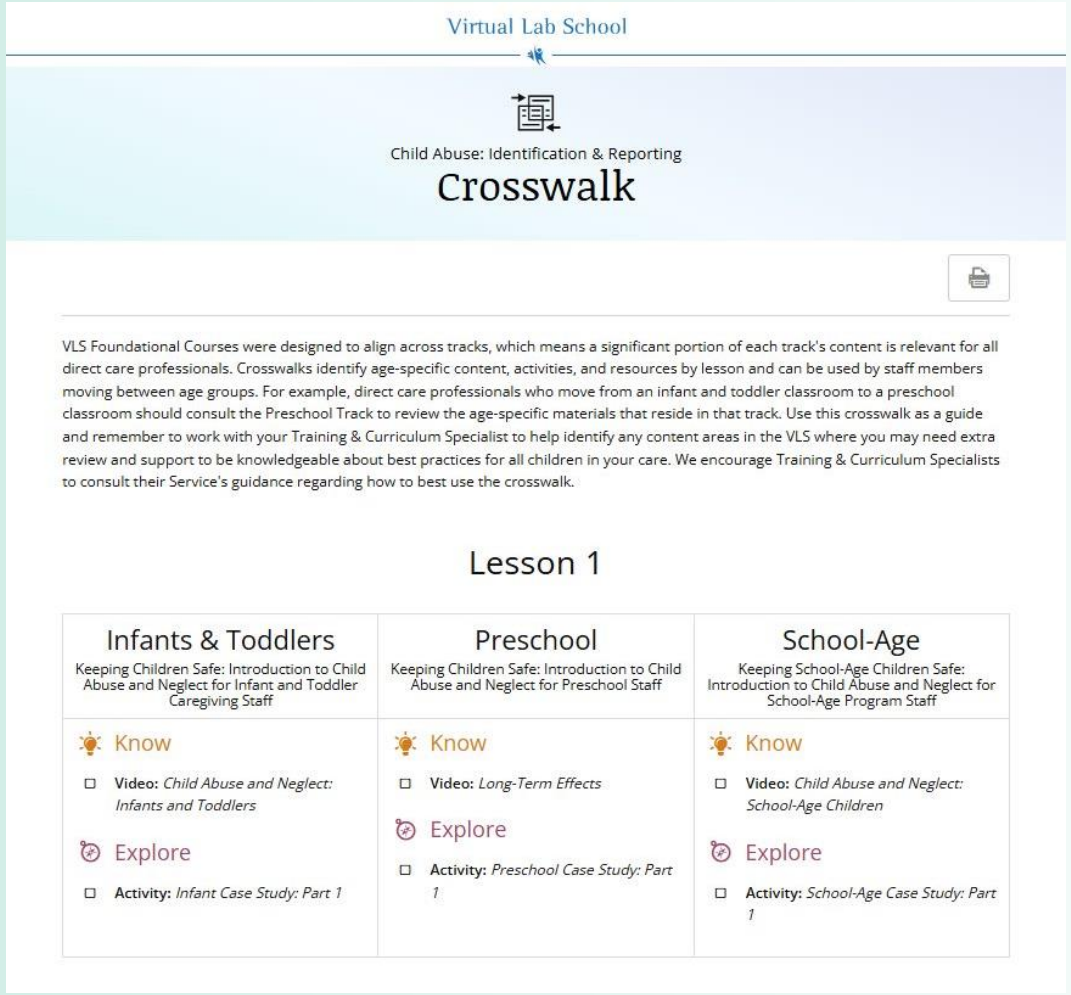
- Required for course certification
- Intended purpose of the tool
- Observation best practices
- Note taking and rating
- Documentation expectations



Communication & Language Development, Competency Reflection

Supporting Professionals that Switch Roles

- VLS Crosswalk was developed to support professionals switching roles
- Follow your service-specific guidance on how and when to use the crosswalk and how to document
- The professional's transcript will show a list of completed courses



Virtual Lab School

Child Abuse: Identification & Reporting

Crosswalk

VLS Foundational Courses were designed to align across tracks, which means a significant portion of each track's content is relevant for all direct care professionals. Crosswalks identify age-specific content, activities, and resources by lesson and can be used by staff members moving between age groups. For example, direct care professionals who move from an infant and toddler classroom to a preschool classroom should consult the Preschool Track to review the age-specific materials that reside in that track. Use this crosswalk as a guide and remember to work with your Training & Curriculum Specialist to help identify any content areas in the VLS where you may need extra review and support to be knowledgeable about best practices for all children in your care. We encourage Training & Curriculum Specialists to consult their Service's guidance regarding how to best use the crosswalk.

Lesson 1

Infants & Toddlers	Preschool	School-Age
Keeping Children Safe: Introduction to Child Abuse and Neglect for Infant and Toddler Caregiving Staff	Keeping Children Safe: Introduction to Child Abuse and Neglect for Preschool Staff	Keeping School-Age Children Safe: Introduction to Child Abuse and Neglect for School-Age Program Staff
Know	Know	Know
☐ **Video:** *Child Abuse and Neglect: Infants and Toddlers*	☐ **Video:** *Long-Term Effects*	☐ **Video:** *Child Abuse and Neglect: School-Age Children*
Explore	Explore	Explore
☐ **Activity:** *Infant Case Study: Part 1*	☐ **Activity:** *Preschool Case Study: Part 1*	☐ **Activity:** *School-Age Case Study: Part 1*

Child Abuse: Identification & Reporting, Crosswalk

Supports for Navigating the System

Support Pages:
https://www.virtuallabschool.org/support

Email:
Support@virtuallabschool.org

Strategies for Sustained Engagement

- Connecting to professional's "why"
- Offering protected time to work on training
- Offering small incentives
  - Course completion challenges
- Celebrating professional's progress
  - Thank you notes
  - Shout outs/ recognition during staff meetings or other communication

Blume et al. (2010), Colquitt et al. (2000), Kyndt et al. (2013)

Additional VLS Supports

- Lessons & activities referenced in today's session
  - Preschool, Cognitive Development, Lesson 5, Explore (CDA Mathematics Activity Plan)
  - Focused Topic, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 1, Apply (VLS Technical Checklist for Coaches)
  - Focused Topic, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 3, Apply (Tips for Introducing New Staff to the VLS)
  - Focused Topic, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 3, Apply (Course Completion Cycle for New Staff)
  - Focused Topic, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 3, Apply (Coach-Staff Member Agreement)
  - CDA Resources, VLS Preschool CDA Activity Guide
  - Communication & Language Development, Course Page, Direct Care Competency Reflection
  - Child Abuse: Identification & Reporting, Course Page, Crosswalk

- Additional courses or pages for review:
  - Program Management (Training and Curriculum Specialist & Program Manager Tracks)
  - Focused Topic, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice
  - Focused Topic:, Leadership Essentials
  - CDA Resources
  - Support Pages
  - CYP Resource Kit

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