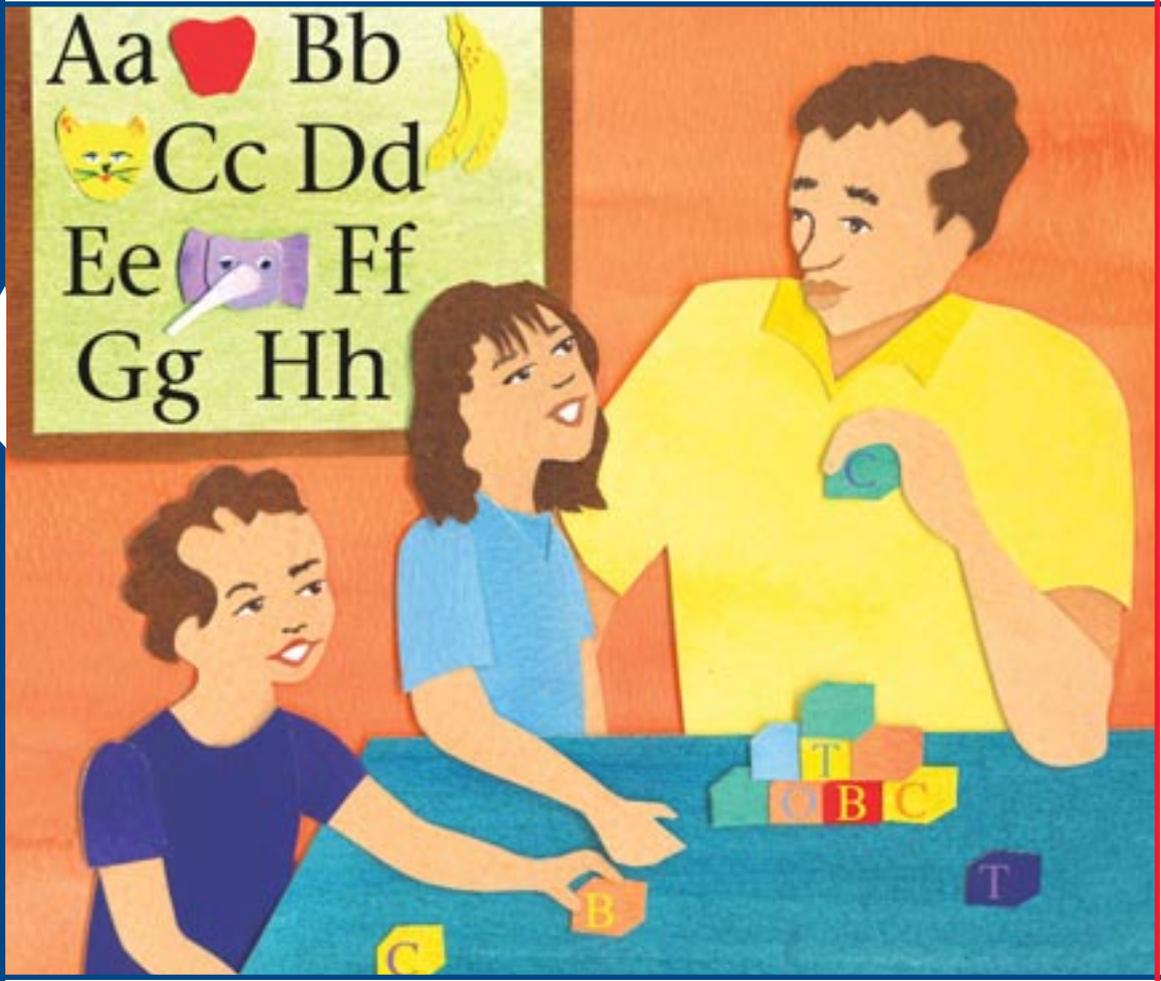


Helping Your Preschool Child



U.S. Department of Education
Margaret Spellings
Secretary

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Helping Your Preschool Child

With activities for children from infancy through age 5

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Communications and Outreach



Foreword

The first five years of a child's life are a time of tremendous physical, emotional, social and cognitive growth. Children enter the world with many needs in order to grow: love, nutrition, health, social and emotional security and stimulation in the important skills that prepare them for school success. Children also enter the world with a great capacity to learn.

Research shows clearly that children are more likely to succeed in learning when their families actively support them. Families who involve their children in activities that allow the children to talk, explore, experiment and wonder show that learning is both enjoyable and important. They motivate their children to take pleasure in learning and to want to learn more. They prepare them to be successful in school—and in life. There is a strong connection between the development a child undergoes early in life and the level of success that the child will experience later in life. When young children are provided an environment rich in language and literacy interactions and full of opportunities to listen to and use language constantly, they can begin to acquire the essential building blocks for learning how to read. A child who enters school without these skills runs a significant risk of starting behind and staying behind.

President Bush believes that all children must begin school with an equal chance at achievement so that no child is left behind. To that end, he signed the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which proposed reforms expressing his confidence in our public schools and their mission to build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America. While the *No Child Left Behind Act* is important because it ensures that public schools are teaching students what they need to know to be successful in life, it also draws attention to the need to prepare children before they start school. You and your family help to create this critical foundation by talking, listening and reading to your child every day and by showing your child that you value learning and education.

This booklet includes activities for families with children from infancy through age 5. Most of the activities make learning experiences out of the everyday routines in which you and your child already participate. Most use materials that are found in your home or that can be had free of charge from your local library. The activities are designed to be fun for both you and your child as well as to help your child gain the skills needed to get ready for school. Enjoy them!

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“The ages between birth and age 5 are the foundation upon which successful lives are built.”

—Laura Bush

Introduction

Scientists who study how the brain works have shown that children learn earlier—and learn more—than we once thought possible. From birth through age 5, children are developing the language, thinking, physical, emotional and social skills that they will need for the rest of their lives.

This booklet is for families and caregivers who want to help their preschool children to learn and to develop the skills necessary for success in school—and in life.

The booklet begins with information that will help you prepare your child to learn and to get ready for school. The major portion of the booklet contains simple activities that you can use with your child. These activities are only a starting point. We hope that you and your child will enjoy them enough to create and try many more on your own.

In addition, the booklet provides suggestions for how to monitor your child’s TV viewing and to choose good TV programs and videos and how to choose suitable child care. It also provides a checklist to guide you as you prepare your child to enter kindergarten.

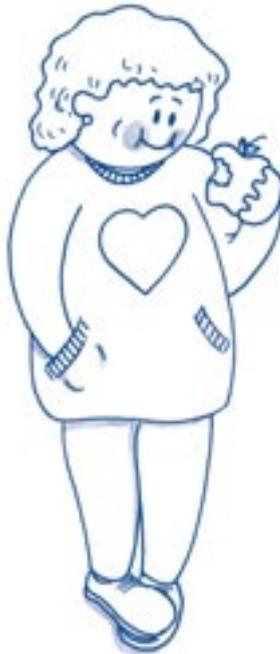
As a parent, you can help your child want to learn in a way no one else can. That desire to learn is a key to your child’s later success. Enjoyment is important! So, if you and your child don’t enjoy one activity, move on to another. You can always return to any activity later on.



How well children will learn and develop and how well they will do in school depends on a number of things, including the children's health and physical well-being, their social and emotional preparation and their language skills and general knowledge of the world.

Good Health and Physical Well-Being

Seeing to it that your preschool child has nutritious food, enough exercise and regular medical care gives him* a good start in life and lessens the chances that he will have serious health problems or trouble learning later on.



Food

Preschoolers require a healthy diet. After your child is born, she requires nutritious food to keep her healthy. School-aged children can concentrate better in class if they eat balanced meals that include servings of breads and cereals; fruits and vegetables; meat, poultry and fish and meat alternatives (such as eggs and dried beans and peas); and milk, cheese and yogurt. You should see to it that your child does not eat too many fatty foods and sweets.

Children aged 2–5 generally can eat the same foods as adults but in smaller portions. Your child's doctor or medical clinic adviser can provide you with advice on what to feed a baby or a toddler who under the age of 2.



* Please note: In this book, we refer to a child as "him" in some places and "her" in others. We do this to make the book easier to read. Please understand, however, that every point that we make is the same for girls and boys.

If you need food for your child, federal, state and local programs can help. For example, the federal nutrition program, called the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), distributes food to low-income women and their children across the country. Food stamp programs also are available. If you want more information or want to find out if you are eligible for food stamps, call or visit your local or state health department. Your local librarian can help you find names, addresses and phone numbers.

Exercise

Preschoolers need opportunities to exercise. To learn to control and coordinate the large muscles in his arms and legs, your child needs to throw and catch balls, run, jump, climb and dance to music. To learn to control and coordinate the small muscles in his hands and fingers, he needs to color with crayons, put together puzzles, use blunt-tipped—safety—scissors, zip his jacket and grasp small objects such as coins.

If you suspect that your child has a disability, see a doctor as soon as possible. Early intervention can help your child to develop to his full potential.





Medical Care

Preschoolers require regular medical checkups, immunizations and dental care. It's important for you to find a doctor or a clinic where your child can receive routine health care as well as special treatment if she becomes sick or injured.



Early immunizations can help prevent a number of diseases including measles, mumps, German measles (rubella), diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b), polio and tuberculosis. These diseases can have serious effects on your child's physical and mental development. Talk to your doctor about the benefits and risks of immunization.*



Beginning by the age of 3 at the latest, your child also should have regular dental checkups.

Social and Emotional Preparation

Children start school with different degrees of social and emotional maturity. These qualities take time and practice to learn. Give your child opportunities at home to begin to develop the following positive qualities.

- ★ **Confidence:** Children must feel good about themselves and believe they can succeed. Confident children are more willing to attempt new tasks—and try again if they don't succeed the first time.
- ★ **Independence:** Children must learn to do things for themselves.
- ★ **Motivation:** Children must want to learn.



* Please note: Some parents and doctors do not agree that immunizations are important. Others have objections to them based on religious or cultural teachings.



If you share things with others, your child also will learn to be thoughtful of others' feelings.

- ★ **Curiosity:** Children are naturally curious and must remain so to get the most out of learning opportunities.
- ★ **Persistence:** Children must learn to finish what they start.
- ★ **Cooperation:** Children must be able to get along with others and learn to share and take turns.
- ★ **Self-control:** Children must learn that there are good and bad ways to express anger. They must understand that some behaviors, such as hitting and biting, are not acceptable.
- ★ **Empathy:** Children must have an interest in others and understand how others feel.



Here are some things that you can do to help your child develop these qualities.

- ★ **Show your child that you care about him and that you are dependable.** Children who feel loved are more likely to be confident. Your child must believe that, no matter what, someone will look out for him. Give your baby or toddler plenty of attention, encouragement, hugs and lap time.
- ★ **Set a good example.** Children imitate what they see others do and what they hear others say. When you exercise and eat nourishing food, your child is more likely to do so as well. When you treat others with respect, your child probably will, too. If you share things with others, your child also will learn to be thoughtful of others' feelings.



- ★ **Provide opportunities for repetition.** It takes practice for a child to crawl, pronounce new words or drink from a cup. Your child doesn't get bored when she repeats things. Instead, by repeating things until she learns them, your child builds the confidence she needs to try new things.
- ★ **Use appropriate discipline.** All children need to have limits set for them. Children whose parents give them firm but loving discipline generally develop better social skills and do better in school than do children whose parents set too few or too many limits. Here are some ideas.
 - ★ Direct your child's activities, but don't be too bossy.
 - ★ Give reasons when you ask your child to do something. Say, for example, "Please move your truck from the stairs so no one falls over it"—not, "Move it because I said so."
 - ★ Listen to your child to find out how he feels and whether he needs special support.

Talk about the exciting things that he will do in kindergarten, such as making art projects, singing and playing games.

- ★ Show love and respect when you are angry with your child. Criticize your child's behavior but not the child. Say, for example, "I love you, but it's not okay for you to draw pictures on the walls. I get angry when you do that."
- ★ Help your child make choices and work out problems. You might ask your 4-year-old, for example, "What can we do to keep your brother from knocking over your blocks?"

- ★ Be positive and encouraging. Praise your child for a job well done. Smiles and encouragement go much further to shape good behavior than harsh punishment.



- ★ **Let your child do many things by herself.** Young children need to be watched closely. However, they learn to be independent and to develop confidence by doing tasks such as dressing themselves and putting their toys away. It's important to let your child make choices, rather than deciding everything for her.
 - ★ **Encourage your child to play with other children and to be with adults who are not family members.** Preschoolers need social opportunities to learn to see the point of view of others. Young children are more likely to get along with teachers and classmates if they have had experiences with different adults and children.
 - ★ **Show a positive attitude toward learning and toward school.** Children come into this world with a powerful need to discover and to explore. If your child is to keep her curiosity, you need to encourage it. Showing enthusiasm for what your child does ("You've drawn a great picture!") helps to make her proud of her achievements.

Children also become excited about starting school when their parents show excitement about this big step. As your child gets ready to enter kindergarten, talk to him about school. Talk about the exciting things that he will do in kindergarten, such as making art projects, singing and playing games. Be enthusiastic as you describe all the important things that he will learn from his teacher—how to read, how to how to count and how to measure and weigh things.



Language and General Knowledge

Children can develop language skills only if they have many opportunities to talk, listen and use language to solve problems and learn about the world.



Long before your child enters school, you can do many things to help her develop language. You can:

- ★ **★ Give your child opportunities to play.** Play is how children learn. It is the natural way for them to explore, to become creative, to learn to make up and tell stories and to develop social skills. Play also helps children learn to solve problems—for example, if her wagon tips over, a child must figure out how to get it upright again. When they stack up blocks, children learn about colors, numbers, geometry, shapes and balance. Playing with others helps children learn how to negotiate.
- ★ **★ Support and guide your child as she learns a new activity.** Parents can help children learn how to do new things by “scaffolding,” or guiding their efforts. For example, as you and your toddler put together a puzzle, you might point to a piece and say, “I think this is the piece we need for this space. Why don’t you try it?” Then have the child pick up the piece and place it correctly. As the child becomes more aware of how the pieces fit into the puzzle, you can gradually withdraw your support.



- ★ **★ Talk to your child, beginning at birth.** Your baby needs to hear your voice. Voices from a television or radio can’t take the place of your voice, because they don’t respond to your baby’s coos and babbles. Your child needs to know that when he makes a certain sound, for example, “mamamamama,” that his mother will respond—she will smile and talk back to him. The more you talk to your baby, the more he will learn and the more he will have to talk about as he gets older.

Everyday activities provide opportunities to talk, sometimes in detail, about what’s happening around him. As you give your child a bath, for example, you might say, “First let’s stick the plug in the drain. Now let’s turn on the water. Do you want your rubber duck? That’s a good idea. Look, the duck is yellow, just like the rubber duck we saw on ‘Sesame Street.’” (See “Baby Talk,” page 17.)



- ★ **★ Listen to your child.** Children have their own special thoughts and feelings, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. As your child’s language skills develop, encourage her to talk about her thoughts and feelings. Listening is the best way to learn what’s on her mind and to discover what she knows and doesn’t know and how she thinks and learns. It also shows your child that her feelings and thoughts are valuable.





★ **Ask your child questions,** particularly questions that require him to give more than a “yes” or “no” response. If, as you walk with your toddler in a park, he stops to pick up leaves, you might point out how the leaves are the same and how they are different.

With an older child, you might ask, “What else grows on trees?”

★ **Answer your child’s questions.** Asking questions is a good way for your child to learn to compare and to classify things—different kinds of dogs, different foods and so forth. Answer your child’s questions thoughtfully and, whenever possible, encourage her to answer her own questions. If you don’t know the answer to a question, say so. Together with your child, try to find the answer.

★ **Read aloud to your child every day.** Children of all ages love to be read to—even babies as young as six weeks. Although your child doesn’t understand the story or poem that you read, reading together

gives her a chance to learn about language and enjoy the sound of your voice. You don’t have to be an excellent reader for your child to enjoy reading aloud together. Just by allowing her to connect reading with the warm experiences of being with you, you can create in her a lifelong love of reading. (See “Read to Me!” page 28.)

You don’t have to be an excellent reader for your child to enjoy reading aloud together.

★ **Be aware of your child’s television viewing.** Good television programs can introduce children to new worlds and promote learning, but poor programs or too much TV watching can be harmful. It’s up to you to decide how much TV and what kinds of shows your child should watch. (See Taking Charge of TV, page 52.)

★ **Be realistic about your child’s abilities and interests.** Set high standards and encourage your child to try new things. Children who aren’t challenged become bored. But children who are pushed along too quickly or who are asked to do things that don’t interest them can become frustrated and unhappy.

★ **Provide opportunities for your child to do and see new things.** The more varied the experiences that she has, the more she will learn about the world. No matter where you live, your community can provide new experiences. Go for walks in your neighborhood or go places on the bus. Visit museums, libraries, zoos and other places of interest.

If you live in the city, spend a day in the country. If you live in the country, spend a day in the city. Let your child hear and make music, dance and paint. Let her participate in activities that help to develop her imaginations and let her express her ideas and feelings. The activities in the next section of this booklet can provide your children with these opportunities.

Children who aren’t challenged become bored. But children who are pushed along too quickly or who are asked to do things that don’t interest them can become frustrated and unhappy.



Activities

The activities in this section are designed to help you prepare your child to learn and develop. Most of the activities are simple and easily can be made part of your daily routines. As you do the activities, remember that repetition is important, especially for very young children. Children enjoy—and learn—from doing the same activity over and over.

The activities are organized by the following age groups:

Babies = Birth to 1 year old

Toddlers = 1 to 3 years old

Preschoolers = ages 3 to 5



Keep in mind that children don't always learn the same things at the same rate. And they don't suddenly stop doing one thing and start doing another just because they are a little older. So use the ages as guides as your child learns and grows and not as hard and fast rules. For example, an activity listed for the toddler age group may work well with a baby. On the other hand, the activity may not interest another child until he becomes a preschooler.

In addition, the activities change to meet the needs of children in the different age groups. Reading aloud activities are good examples. Reading aloud with your baby involves showing her a book and largely telling the story without placing too much emphasis on the actual written words. With older infants and toddlers, you stick closer to the written words and ask your child to identify or name pictures that go with the words. As your child develops language skills, you shift some of the story "reading" to her. When your child starts to recognize letters and perhaps words, you

can call her attention to words that appear often or that she has learned to recognize from other reading.

Each section begins with a list of accomplishments and behaviors that are typical for the children in the age group. This is followed by a list of things that you can provide to help your child learn and grow. Again, because each child learns at his own rate, you should consider the lists only as guidelines.

As you use the activities, please remember the following points:

- ★ **Some of these activities, although listed for a particular age group, are beneficial for children in all of the age groups.** Reading aloud, for example, is important to children from the time they are born. By modifying an activity, you enable your child to continue to enjoy it as she grows and develops.
- ★ **Find activities that interest your child.** If you pick an activity that is too hard, your child may get discouraged. If it's too easy, he may get bored. Or if your child seems uninterested in an activity, try it again at some other time. Often children's interests change as they grow. Try to give your toddler or preschooler a choice of activities so that he learns to think for himself.
- ★ **The activities are meant to be fun.** As you and your child do an activity, be enthusiastic and avoid lecturing to her about what she is learning and how important it is. If your child enjoys the activity, her excitement for learning will increase.

When your child starts to recognize letters and perhaps words, you can call her attention to words that appear often or that she has learned to recognize from other reading.

Babies

Birth to 1 Year Old

What to Expect

Babies grow and change dramatically during their first year. They begin to

- ★ Develop some control over their bodies. They learn to hold their heads up, roll over, sit up, crawl, stand up and, in some cases, walk.
- ★ Become aware of themselves as separate from others. They learn to look at their hands and toes and play with them. They learn to cry when their parents leave and to recognize their own names.
- ★ Play games. Babies first play with their own hands. Later they show an interest in toys, enjoy “putting in and taking out” games and eventually carry around or hug dolls or stuffed toys.
- ★ Relate to others. Babies first respond to adults more than they do to other babies. Later they notice other babies, but they tend to treat these babies as objects instead of people. Then they pay attention when other babies make sounds.
- ★ Communicate and develop language skills. Babies first cry and make throaty noises. Later they babble and say “mama” and “dada.” Then they make lots of sounds and begin to name a few familiar people and objects. They begin to enjoy hearing rhyming and silly language.

They learn to look at their hands and toes and play with them. They learn to cry when their parents leave and to recognize their own names.

What Babies Need

Babies require

- ★ Loving parents or caregivers who respond to their cries and gurgles and who keep them safe and comfortable;
- ★ Opportunities to move about and to practice new physical skills;
- ★ Safe objects to look at, bat, grab, bang, pat, roll and examine;
- ★ Safe play areas; and
- ★ Many opportunities to hear language, to make sounds and to have someone respond to those sounds.



Developing Trust

Feeling your touch, hearing your voice and enjoying the comfort of physical closeness all help your baby to develop trust.

What You Need

Music

What to Do

- ★ Gently move your newborn’s arms and legs. Or tickle her lightly under the chin or on the tummy. When she starts to control her head, lie on the floor and put her head on your chest. Let her reach for your nose or grab your hair. Talk to her and name each thing that she touches.

Babies need to become attached to at least one person who provides them with security and love. This first and most basic emotional attachment is the start for all human relationships.



★ Place your baby on your belly. Some research has shown that such contact releases chemicals called *endorphins* that help your child feel comforted. In addition, such contact builds stomach and back muscle strength that is essential as your child learns to crawl.

★ Sing and cuddle with your baby. Hold him snuggled in your arms or lying face up on your lap with his head on your knees. Make sure the head of a newborn is well-supported. Sing a favorite lullaby.



★ Include happy rituals in your baby's schedule. For example, at bedtime, sing the same songs every night, rock her or rub her tummy.

★ Pick up your crying baby promptly. Try to find out what's wrong. Is he hungry? Wet? Bored? Too hot? Crying is your baby's way of communicating. By comforting him, you send the message that language has a purpose and that someone wants to understand him.

★ To entertain your baby, sing an action song. For example:

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!

If you're happy and you know it and you want the world to know it,

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!

If you don't know lullabies or rhymes, make up your own!

★ Dance with your baby. To soothe her when she's upset, put your baby's head on your shoulder and hum softly or listen to recorded music as you glide around the room. To amuse her when she's cheerful, try a bouncy tune.



Touch and See!

Whenever they are awake, babies are hard at work, trying to learn all about the world. To help them learn, they need many different things to play with and inspect. Objects you have around your home offer many possibilities.

What You Need

- ★ A wooden spoon with a face drawn on the bowl
- ★ Different textured fabrics, such as velvet, cotton, corduroy, terry cloth, satin, burlap and fake fur
- ★ An empty toilet-paper or paper-towel roll
- ★ Pots, pans and lids
- ★ An old purse or basket with things to put in and take out
- ★ Measuring cups and spoons
- ★ Boxes and plastic containers
- ★ Large spoons
- ★ Noisemakers (rattles, keys, a can filled with beans)



Babies begin to understand how the world works when they see, touch, hold and shake things. Inspecting things also helps them to coordinate and strengthen their hand muscles.

What to Do

- ★ Let your baby look at, touch and listen to a variety of objects. Objects that are brightly colored, have interesting textures and make noises are particularly good.
- ★ Put one or two of the objects in a play area where your baby can reach them—more than two may confuse him. (Many of the objects will interest toddlers and older preschoolers. For example, babies love to inspect a paper towel roll. But a 4-year-old might use it as a megaphone for talking or singing, a telescope or a tunnel for a toy car.)





Baby Talk

Babies love hearing the voices of the people in their lives.

What You Need

No materials are required

What to Do

- ★ Talk to your baby often. Answer her coos and gurgles. Repeat the “ga, ga’s” she makes and smile back. Sometimes, you can supply the language for her. For example, when your baby stretches her arm toward her bottle and says, “ga-ga-ga,” say, “Oh, you’re ready for some more milk? Here’s your milk. Isn’t it good!”
- ★ Say or read to your child nursery rhymes or other verses that have strong rhythms and repeated patterns of sound. Vary your tone of voice, make funny faces and sing lullabies. Play games such as “peek-a-boo” and “pat-a-cake” with him.
- ★ Play simple talking and touching games with your baby. Ask, “Where’s your nose?” Then touch her nose and say playfully, “There’s your nose!” Do this several times, then switch to an ear or knee or her tummy. Stop when she or you grows tired of the game.



From the very beginning, babies try to imitate the sounds that they hear us make. They “read” the looks on our faces and our movements. Talking, singing, smiling and gesturing to your child helps her to love — and learn to use—language.

- ★ Change the game by touching the nose or ear and repeating the word for it several times. Do this with objects, too. When she hears you name something over and over again, your child begins to connect the sound with what it means.
- ★ Point to and name familiar objects. By hearing an object named over and over, your baby learns to associate the spoken word with its meaning. For example, “Here’s your blanket. Your very favorite blanket. What a nice, soft blanket!”



Toddlers

1 to 3 Years Old

What to Expect

Between their first and second birthdays, children

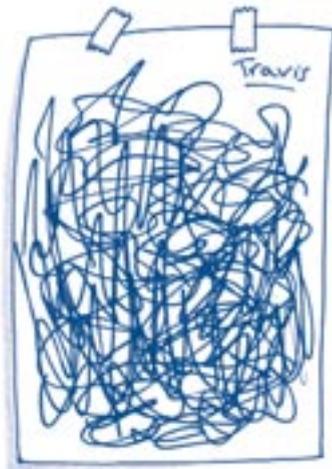
- ★ Are energetic, busy and curious;
- ★ Are self-centered;
- ★ Like to imitate the sounds and actions of others (for example, by repeating words that parents and others say and by pretending to do housework or yard work with adults);
- ★ Want to be independent and to do things for themselves;
- ★ Have short attention spans if they are not involved in an activity that interests them;
- ★ Add variations to their physical skills (for example, by walking backwards);



- ★ Begin to see how they are like and unlike other children;
- ★ Play alone or alongside other toddlers;
- ★ Increase their spoken vocabularies from about 2 or 3 words to about 250 words and understand more of what people say to them;
- ★ Ask parents and others to read aloud to them, often requesting favorite books or stories; and
- ★ Pretend to read and write the way they see parents and others do.

Between their second and third birthdays, children

- ★ Become more aware of others;
- ★ Become more aware of their own feelings and thoughts;
- ★ Are often stubborn and may have temper tantrums;
- ★ Able to walk, run, jump, hop, roll and climb;
- ★ Expand their spoken vocabularies from about 250 to 1,000 words during the year;
- ★ Put together 2-, 3- and 4-word spoken sentences;
- ★ Begin to choose favorite stories and books to hear read aloud;
- ★ Begin to count;
- ★ Begin to pay attention to print, such as the letters in their names;
- ★ Begin to distinguish between drawing and writing; and
- ★ Begin to scribble, making some marks that are like letters.



What Toddlers Need

1- to 2-year-old children require

- ★ Opportunities to make their own choices: “Do you want the red cup or the blue one?”;
- ★ Clear and reasonable limits;
- ★ Opportunities to use large muscles in the arms and legs;
- ★ Opportunities to use small muscles to manipulate small objects, such as puzzles and stackable toys;
- ★ Activities that allow them to touch, taste, smell, hear and see new things;
- ★ Chances to learn about “cause and effect”—that things they do cause other things to happen (for example, stacking blocks too high will cause the blocks to fall);
- ★ Opportunities to develop and practice their language skills;
- ★ Opportunities to play with and learn about alphabet letters and numbers; and
- ★ Opportunities to learn about books and print.

2- to 3-year-old children require opportunities to

- ★ Develop hand coordination (for example, by holding crayons and pencils, putting together puzzles or stringing large beads);
- ★ Do more things for themselves, such as dressing themselves;
- ★ Talk, sing and develop their language skills;
- ★ Play with other children and develop their social skills;
- ★ Try out different ways to move their bodies;
- ★ Learn more about printed language and books and how they work;
- ★ Do things to build vocabulary and knowledge and to learn more about the world, such as taking walks and visiting libraries, museums, restaurants, parks and zoos.





Shop Till You Drop

Shopping for groceries is just one of many daily routines that you can use to help your child learn. Shopping is especially good for teaching your child new words and for introducing him to new people and places.



What You Need

- ★ A grocery shopping list

What to Do

- ★ Pick a time when neither you nor your child is hungry or tired.
- ★ At the grocery store, put your child in the grocery cart so that he faces you. Take your time as you walk up and down the aisles.
- ★ Let your child feel the items that you buy—a cold carton of milk, for example or the skin of an orange. Talk to your child about the items: “The skin of the orange is rough and bumpy. Here, you feel it.”
- ★ Be sure to name the objects that you see on shelves and talk about what you are seeing and doing: “First, we’re going to buy some cereal. See, it’s in a big red and blue box. Listen to the great noise it makes when I shake the box. Can you shake the box? Now we’re going to pay for the groceries. We’ll put them on the counter while I get out the money. The cashier will tell us how much we have to pay.”

- ★ Encourage your child to practice saying “hi” and “bye-bye” to clerks and other shoppers.
- ★ Leave for home before your child gets tired or grumpy.

Children need to hear a lot of words in order to learn how to communicate. It’s particularly helpful when you talk about the “here and now”—things that are going on in front of your child.

Puppet Magic

Puppets are fascinating to children. They know that puppets are not alive, yet they often listen to and talk with them as if they were real.

What You Need

- ★ An old, clean sock
- ★ Buttons (larger than 1 inch in diameter to prevent swallowing)
- ★ Needle and thread
- ★ Red fabric
- ★ Ribbon
- ★ An old glove
- ★ Felt-tipped pens
- ★ Glue
- ★ Yarn

What to Do

- ★ To make puppets:

—**Sock puppet:** Use an old, clean sock. On the toe-end of the sock, sew on buttons for eyes and nose. Paste or sew on a piece of red fabric for the mouth. Put a bow made from ribbon at the neck.



—**Finger puppets:** Cut off the fingers of an old glove. Draw faces on the ends of the fingers with felt-tipped pens. Glue on yarn for hair.



★ Things to do with puppets:

- Have the puppet talk to your child: “Hello. My name is Tanya. What’s yours? Kaylee. That’s a pretty name. What a great T-shirt you have on, Kaylee! I like the rabbit on the front of your T-shirt.” Or have the puppet sing a simple song. Use a special voice for the puppet.
- Encourage your child to talk to the puppet, answering its questions and asking questions of her own.
- Put finger puppets on your child’s hand to give him practice moving his fingers one at a time.
- The next time you want your child to help you clean up, have the puppet make the request: “Hello, Max. Let’s put these crayons back in the box and these toys back on the shelves. Can you get the ball for me?”



Puppets provide another opportunity for you to talk to your child and encourage him to talk to you as well. They also help your child to learn new words, use his imagination and develop hand and finger coordination.

★
Moving On

Toddlers love to explore spaces and to climb over, through and into things.

What You Need

- ★ Stuffed animal or toy
- ★ Large board boxes
- ★ Pillows
- ★ A large sheet
- ★ A soft ball
- ★ A large plastic laundry basket
- ★ Elastic
- ★ Bells



What to Do

- ★ **Pillow jump.** Give your child several pillows to jump into. (Toddlers usually figure out how to do this on their own.)
- ★ **Box car.** Give your child a large cardboard box to push around the room. He may want to take his stuffed animal or toy for a ride in it. If the box isn’t too high—you’ll most likely find your toddler in the box as well.



Movement activities help children to gain control of their large muscles. They also help children to learn new words and important concepts such as locations: up, down, inside, outside, over, behind, beside and under.

- ★ **Basketball.** Sit about 3 feet away from your child and hold out a large plastic laundry basket. Let her try throwing a large, soft ball into the basket.
- ★ **Table tent.** Cover a table with a sheet that's big enough to reach the floor on all sides. This makes a great playhouse that's particularly good for a rainy day.
- ★ **Jingle bells.** Sew bells onto elastic that will fit comfortably around your child's ankles. Then watch (and listen) as he moves about or jumps up and down.

As you do an activity, talk, talk, talk with your child about what the two of you are doing!

★ Music Makers

★ Music is a way to communicate that all children understand. It's not necessary for them to follow the words to a song; it makes them happy just to hear the comfort in your voice or on the recording or to dance to a peppy tune.

★ What You Need

- ★ Music
- ★ Noise makers (rattles, a can filled with beans or buttons, empty toilet paper rolls, pots, pans, plastic bowls)



★ What to Do

- ★ Have your toddler try banging a wooden spoon on pots, pans or plastic bowls; shaking a large rattle or shaking a securely closed plastic container filled with beans, buttons or other noisy items; and blowing through toilet-paper or paper-towel rolls.
- ★ Sing or play recordings of nursery rhymes. Have your toddler participate actively. Even if he can't recite the words, he can imitate your hand movements, clap or hum along.
- ★ As your child becomes more physically coordinated, encourage her to move to the music. She can twirl, spin, jump up and down, tiptoe or sway.
- ★ Find recordings of all kinds of music for your child to listen to. Help her learn to clap out rhythms, to move to both slow and fast music and to listen carefully for special sounds in the music.

Here are a few tips to get your child to sing:

- Sing yourself. Sing fairly slowly so that your child can join in. Discourage shouting.
- Start with simple chanting. Pick a simple melody, such as “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” and sing, “la, la, la.” Add the words later.
- Make singing a natural part of your daily routine—let your child hear you sing as you work around the house or sing along with songs on the radio or TV or with your own CDs or recordings. Encourage him to join in.

Introduce music to your child early. Music and dance help children learn to listen, to coordinate hand and body movements and to express themselves creatively.

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