

Your role is very important!

As a parent (or caregiver), YOU are your child's first and most important teacher. You can support your child by showing how learning can be fun. By following your child's interests at a natural pace, you can promote a full and happy childhood and success in school.

Watch and Learn

Every child has different interests, skills, and attention span. Try to observe your child's behaviors, watching for new tasks or interests that may be good times to sit down with your child. Pay attention to what your child chooses to do most often, and find ways to work new tasks into something he or she already does well. When you follow your child's pace, it will be easier to know when it's time for a new task, or when it's time for a break.

Make Time to Be Together

Your days are busy, but there are ways to show your child that he or she is important to you. It's a good idea to do things, such as mealtime and bedtime, at the same time every day so your child knows what to expect. Your child will enjoy even a short time when you can give your full attention. If you are asked to play when you are too busy, give another time to your child and an option of other things to do for the time being. Be sure to keep your promise to play later.

Lead by Showing

Children like to do what they see older children or adults doing. Make learning activities part of the culture of your home. Read for your own pleasure, and keep books, magazines, or newspapers in your home to show your child that reading is important to you. Go to cultural events or classes for adults at local libraries, museums, and parks—many are offered at little or no cost.

Be Practical

Some parents feel pressure for their children to be the best in everything. Be sure to show love and affection for your child often and for no special reason. Try not to compare your child to other children, including your other children. Remember that all kinds of skills have value, not only school or sports performance. Young children are learning all the time, and social and life skills are quite valuable. Teaching your child how to have fun and how to rest can be good lessons, too.

Assist Being Independent

Children can often do a lot more than you expect. Encourage your child to desire to do things on his or her own. Often this means involving your child in your family's everyday activities. He or she may be able to help with chores, such as putting dishes on a low shelf. Even if things aren't done perfectly (or quickly), your child will be proud to help. Once your child picks a task, allow him or her enough time to do it well before moving on to a new task.

Your Child's Space

Fewer items in a space can help a young child to pay attention, while a space with lots of toys or books can be too exciting. Use low shelves with a few toys or books at a time, and rotate items in when your child is ready for a change. Have one low shelf for crayons, paper, or other items that your child can use with or without you. Whenever possible, provide child-sized furniture and other items, such as small blunt-nosed scissors or small plates and cups. Children often prefer real items, such as wooden spoons and bowls like yours, over plastic toy versions.

Keep Trying

Don't worry about small setbacks or be surprised when an activity or item your child loved one day is ignored the next. Your child is always growing into new ideas and talents. Keep in mind that repeating things is helpful for young children; you don't need to find a new place to visit every week or a brand-new story to read every night. Repeating instructions and taking small steps in learning a new task is normal. If you or your child feels frustrated, set the task aside for a while or offer nonfood rewards for trying. As your child learns, watch for things he or she enjoys and does well. Your praise will help your child to keep trying until he or she succeeds.

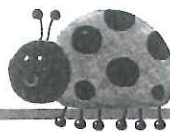
Have Fun

Show your child you are happy when he or she does a good job, and be upbeat even when you need to correct an error (or clean up a mess!). The way your child does a task and what she or he thinks is a task "well done" may be different from what you think. Allow plenty of time and space for trial and error. Find ways to play with your child that you enjoy, too. Whether you're playing games to teach or purely for fun, plan to stop playing before either of you get too tired or bored. If the end of playtime is still fun, your child will look forward to the next time.

The next few pages provide ideas for games and activities you can share with your preschool or kindergarten child. Resources and references are listed at the end of each skill area. You may also want to visit <http://www.familyeducation.com/home/>, an online network of learning resources for parents, teachers, and children of all ages.



DEVELOPING MOTOR SKILLS



Promoting large-muscle skills, small-muscle skills, and skills that depend on the eyes and hands working together will give your child confidence and help him or her develop independence.

Large-Muscle Activities

Building large-muscle strength is important for children's balance, coordination, and posture, and it helps them to develop other skills such as writing. Some activities to build large muscles are:

- **Walking** forward, sideways, backward, and marching.
- **Balancing games**, such as walking on a piece of string or tape on the floor, or along a sidewalk crack or low curb outside. Also practice walking on uneven surfaces (e.g., sand, rocks, pillows/cushions on the floor).
- **Kicking, bouncing, throwing, and catching games** with objects of different sizes and weights (e.g., beanbags, beach balls, soccer balls). Make up games of throwing balls or beanbags into an empty container, or play a game of soccer or basketball without keeping score.
- **Jumping games**, such as hopscotch

or jumping rope. Play "Follow the Leader" with hopping and skipping.

- **Swinging, sliding, and climbing** at a park or indoor playground.
- **Riding bikes, tricycles, scooters**, or other ride-on toys.
- **Pulling or pushing** wagons or carts.
- **Building and going on a race** using common objects (e.g., crawling under chairs and tables, jumping over a stack of books, walking on crooked lines, weaving between toys on the floor).
- **Dancing** or other free movement to music/songs (e.g., "Ring Around the Rosie").

Small-Muscle Activities

Having good finger, wrist, and hand strength, skill, and coordination helps with many daily tasks, including eating, dressing, and writing. Some activities to build small muscles are:

- **Molding clay** by squeezing, pinching, and shaping it into objects or animals.
- **Building with blocks** of all sizes, shapes, and textures. Use ring stackers and puzzles to practice putting things together.

- **Putting small objects in containers**, such as plastic bottle caps into a box with a small opening. Always supervise your child when he/she is playing with small objects.
- **Lacing or threading**, such as stringing beads, cereal pieces, or macaroni onto pipe cleaners.
- **Drawing and coloring** using crayons, colored pencils, markers, chalk, etc. Bathtub crayons are great tools to make bath time fun and educational!
- **Cutting** out shapes or pictures from old catalogs or magazines. Use hole-punches or other shape punches to make designs or patterns.
- **Playing with toys** with dials to turn, lids to twist, keys to wind up, or strings to pull.
- **Putting clothes on dolls or toy animals**, especially clothes with zippers, buttons, or snaps.
- **Common tasks**, such as using a trigger sprayer to water plants, closing zipper-lock plastic bags, or squeezing out sponges filled with water.



Resources

<http://www.healthychildren.org>

HealthyChildren.org is a parenting website created by pediatricians with information from the American Academy of Pediatrics' publications and child health resources.

<http://www.gameskidsplay.net/>

This listing of kids' games includes rules for playground games and verses for jump-rope rhymes.

<http://www.serve.gov/lrlm.asp>

Let's Read. Let's Move. This website was created to combat childhood obesity and summer reading loss by engaging youth in physical activity and encouraging summer reading. It is led by the Corporation for National and Community Service in collaboration with First Lady Michelle Obama, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Institute of Museums and Libraries.

<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/>

ZERO TO THREE is a national nonprofit organization that provides information and support to professionals, policymakers, and parents in order to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

http://donnayoung.org/penmanship/k_1.htm

This website offers free printable handwriting exercises (e.g., how to print letters, numbers).

<http://www.do2learn.com/activities/artprojects/howtodraw/index.htm>

This website provides free, step-by-step, simple instructions for drawing basic figures such as dogs, people, flowers, houses, etc.

DEVELOPING CONCEPT SKILLS



Learning basic concepts such as colors, sizes, shapes, and numbers helps children understand new words and ideas. It also gives children ways to tell you about what they see or want.

- **Name parts of the body** as you wash during bath time, or ask your child to point to body parts on dolls or toy animals. Even very young children learn to sing "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" quickly.
- **Play the game "Same and Different"** using pictures from magazines, small toys and other objects, or playing cards for matching games. Start with two piles of pictures or objects and match same items or pictures (e.g., two boats, two pennies, two queens) or match objects that often go together (e.g., a shoe and sock, knife and fork, salt and pepper).
- **Practice counting** by making counting part of your daily routine. Play "Simon Says" and ask children to "Jump two times" or "Wiggle your finger four times" or "Blink one time." In the car or bus, count types of things you see through the window to teach the idea that a number stands for a certain amount. You might count cars of a certain color or model, the number of stoplights during the trip, etc.
- **Name the colors** of your child's most liked toys or shirts to help your child learn the colors he or she sees often. Household items, such as socks or books, can be sorted or arranged by colors. Try a color hunt at home and ask your child to find objects that are the color you name.
- **Compare the shapes and sizes** of common items, or make up a guessing game: "Which is bigger? A raisin or an apple?" Make a game of naming which item doesn't belong by showing your child three small items that look alike and one larger one. Ask your child to find all the objects in the house that are shaped like a circle, square, diamond, etc.
- **Memory games** are fun to play with children. Place various objects on a tray and have your child look at them for 5 seconds. Then, have your child cover his/her eyes and remove an object. Ask your child which object was removed.

Resources

Toys: Bingo and lotto games, simple card games like "Go Fish"

Many board games and digital games require memory and matching skills. Look for themes or pictures that your child may be curious about (e.g., animals, a particular cartoon character).

<http://www.minimops.com/>

This free website features games and activities for children ages 2 through 5 years.

http://www.fisher-price.com/fp.aspx?st=10&e=gameslanding&mcat=game_infant,game_toddler,game_preschool

The toy and gear manufacturer's website includes a section of online games designed for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/games>

With popular Sesame Street® characters, these free computer video games show children how to sort, count, put like things together, and more.

<http://pbskids.org/>

Characters including Curious George®, Sid the Science Kid™, and Clifford the Big Red Dog™ show children how to organize, count, put like things together, etc.



DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Being able to perceive, produce, and use words to understand and communicate with others is essential for children to get along well with other people and to learn how to read and write. Children develop language skills by hearing, seeing, doing, and repeating.

- **Read together every day.** Talk about the pictures and ask your child to tell you what's happening. Go to the library and check out books together. Most libraries also have free story time.
- **Sing simple songs or recite nursery rhymes.** Once your child knows a song or rhyme well, surprise your child with funny changes (e.g., a cow says "oink" and a pig says "meow").
- **Make up a story** or act out common tasks with your child (e.g., cooking food, going to the doctor). Use puppets, dolls, and other toys as story props to make it more fun. You can make a book of your child's story, or if you have a video camera, you can film your child's movie.
- **Talk about daily activities** as they happen, such as the steps to make breakfast each morning (e.g., "First we get a bowl then we get the cereal."). Wherever you go, describe the smells, sounds, people, and things that you see.
- **Expand your child's language** by answering him or her with a well-formed sentence that includes a new word or idea. For example, if your child says, "Truck broke," you might respond by saying, "The truck is broken. It needs a new wheel."
- **Play games with sounds and words**, such as clapping out syllables of words, finding an object that starts with a certain sound or letter, and playing opposite-word games (e.g., "Soup is hot but ice cream is ____").
- **Show that printed words have meaning** by showing examples other than in books, such as signs on your street and items at home like food boxes.
- **In the bath using foam letters**, have your child stick the letters on the bathtub wall and make up words or spell a name. Whatever he or she spells, try to sound it out, even if it's a nonsense word!
- **Encourage use of any language** your child hears often. Young children's brains can understand more than one language.



Resources

<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/chart.htm>

<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/parent-stim-activities.htm>

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association offers information representing, on average, the age by which most children speaking one language will be able to do certain things. The website provides a chart of what your child should be able to do and ideas for activities to improve skills.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/7833>

The Reading Rockets website features reading tips for parents of preschoolers, including tip sheets in other languages. Reading Rockets is an educational first step of WETA, the most popular public television and radio station in Washington, D.C., and is funded by a major grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

www.bobbooks.com

With only four letters in the beginning Bob Books®, your child can sound out all the words and read the whole book on his or her own, thus increasing confidence.

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/6313>

The Learning Disabilities Association of America has published a speech and language milestone chart online.

<http://literacynetwork.verizon.org/tln/31days/>

Thirty-one fun activities for you and your child (ages 3 to 5) to do together to help build literacy skills.

<http://fun.familyeducation.com/preschool/extracurricular-activities/33392.html?detoured=1>

The Family Education Network shares activity ideas for your preschool-aged child to build learning skills.

<http://www.storylineonline.net/>

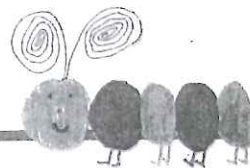
This streaming video program features Screen Actors Guild members reading children's books.

<http://pbskids.org/read>

PBS Ready to Learn Program



DEVELOPING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS



Understanding their own feelings helps children know how to express themselves and how to behave in difficult situations. Understanding the feelings of others helps children build strong friendships and learn fairness and compassion.

- **Set practical goals** for your child's social skills development. Limit your requests and be clear when you ask your child to act differently. For example, asking a child to keep his body still is clearer than asking him to be good. Plan social events at good times of the day for your child, and don't let them last too long. A hungry or tired child may behave poorly in a new situation that could otherwise be fun. Say clearly what happens if rules are not followed, and always follow through on any results you've stated.
- **Set daily routines** to help your child learn order and structure. For example, a daily routine might include choosing a shirt, getting dressed, eating breakfast, and then brushing teeth at the same time every morning. When your child completes tasks and routines without being distracted, give a lot of praise.
- **Model good behavior** in settings where your child must be polite, honest, or make mistakes without getting upset. Talk with your child

about different kinds of feelings, and show how to be caring toward others. For example, small children will quickly learn to ask a crying person if he or she needs a tissue or a hug. Remind your child often of polite words to use, such as, "Excuse me" or "I'm sorry" or "Are you okay?" Practice how to wait until the other person is done talking in a conversation and how to nicely say no to a friend's request. If your child gets upset or throws a tantrum, try to stay calm. A parent who gets upset during a tantrum will only reinforce bad behavior. Instead, calmly tell your child to ask for what he or she wants without crying or whining. Another plan that may be useful is calmly setting a time-out period where the child decides when he or she is ready to come out.

- **Let your child pay attention to one thing at a time.** Often the toys or activities children choose give them a chance practice a new skill at their own rate and in their own way. Make time to play with your child. You can pretend to be a patient for the doctor or a customer at the restaurant. Don't be surprised if your child often picks the same activity or toy, or if he or she stays on one task longer than expected. Your child will move on to the next thing when the time is right.

- **Encourage your child to play with other children.** He or she will learn to show feelings, to respect others by sharing and taking turns, and how to get along with new people. When children are very young, invite one or two other children of the same age to play in your home.
- **Assist independent thinking** by going along with your child's pretend play. Your child's imaginary play is made up of his or her first original ideas, and it's important to show that you value those ideas. Encourage your child's creativity by playing along even when it feels silly. Provide dress-up clothes, pretend or real kitchen items, or puppets for creative play. Offer your child plain paper rather than printed coloring books. Ask your child to describe the things he or she likes or dislikes and tell you why. Start a "This is Me" album for keepsakes or pictures your child decides are important. This album may become a journal or diary as he or she grows older.



Resources

<http://www.brightfutures.org/mentalhealth/pdf/tools.html#families>

The early childhood section of the mental health tool kit from Bright Futures at Georgetown University includes PDFs of articles and activities related to fears, sleep, limit setting, creating special time, behavior, communication, sibling interaction, and time outs.

<http://www.freespirit.com>

Free Spirit Publishing offers books for children and parents about children's social-emotional needs.

If you need more ideas, consider talking with other people who have young children's interests in mind, such as early childhood family education (ECFE) program coordinators, other parents, your family doctor, a social worker, librarians (especially those who lead preschool activities), and daycare professionals or teachers you meet in your neighborhood or at your place of worship.

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DEVELOPING SELF-HELP SKILLS



Children, just like adults, want to be independent. Becoming skilled at common tasks, such as dressing, grooming, and daily chores, will help build self-importance and allow your child to gain the confidence to try new things.

- **Set daily routines** so your child learns that some tasks come before others, such as washing hands before cooking or eating food and brushing teeth before going to bed.
- **Break tasks into small steps** with clear and short directions (e.g., for hand washing: wet hands, use soap, scrub front and back of hands, rinse, and dry).

- **Show how to do a task** many times before you ask your child to try it on his or her own. Describe what you are doing as you complete each step.
- **Allow lots of time for practice** of a new skill. Give lots of praise both for trying and for completing a new task.
- **Work together as a family** to get chores done. Teaching your child at a young age to help out will prepare him or her to become a helpful and responsible adult.
- **Explain safety rules** and be sure your child is aware of dangerous things in your home (e.g., don't touch the dials or buttons on the stove). Teach your child his or her full name, phone number, address, and how and when to call 911.
- **Chore charts** that use stickers and a reward system for doing tasks (e.g., getting dressed, putting away toys, washing hands without a reminder) can build self-esteem and foster independence.



Resources

<http://kidshealth.org/>

This resource website provides articles about child health, development, and behavior.

<http://ada.org/3230.aspx>

The American Dental Association offers videos for children on brushing their teeth.

http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14&tax_level=2&tax_subject=231&topic_id=1196

This U.S. Department of Agriculture website includes food safety games and activities designed for children.

<http://www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com/>

In addition to free printable chore charts that include popular characters, this website offers behavior management resources for parents and teachers.