



Parents as Teachers®



Foundational Curriculum





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Blanket Pull: Planning and Coordinating Movement

Jalar la cobija: Planificar y coordinar los movimientos



Boxed Play Space: Seeing and Touching

Caja con cosas para jugar: ver y tocar

Cereal Box Road: Stopping, Going, and Listening

Camino con cajas de cereales: parar, andar y escuchar

Chase the Can: Being Curious and Crawling

Perseguir la lata: Curiosidad y gateo

Down the Chute: Experimenting and Coordinating Movement

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Fill the Jug: Picking Up and Turning

Llenar el recipiente: Recoger y dar vuelta

Lid Pictures: Naming and Stacking

Ilustraciones con tapas: nombrar y apilar

Mirror Play: Looking and Finding

Jugar al espejo: Mirar y encontrar

Obstacle Course: Crawling Over and Around

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Paper Pull: Using Small Muscles and Understanding Cause and Effect

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Promoting Walking: Pushing and Cruising

Animarlo a caminar: Empujar y desplazarse

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Ponerse de pie: Agacharse y caminar apoyándose en muebles

Push-Pull Toy: Walking Backwards, Pulling, and Pushing

Juguete para jalar y empujar: Caminar hacia atrás, jalar y empujar

Roller Book: Learning Words and Moving

Libro rodante: Aprender palabras y moverse

Sing a Song: Learning Rhyme, Rhythm, and Movement

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Unwrapping a Toy: Being Curious and Exploring

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Charola con agua: Salpicar y aprender nuevas palabras

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¿Adónde se fue? Buscar y tocar

Where's the Block? Looking for Hidden Objects

¿Dónde está el bloque? Buscar objetos escondidos

Zip-Top Bag Book: Reading Together

Libro con bolsas: Leer juntos

Activity Pages: 14 to 24 Months

Body Parts: Looking and Listening

Partes del cuerpo: Mirar y escuchar



Book of Sounds: Relating Sounds to Objects

Libros de sonidos: Relacionar sonidos y objetos

Chips in a Can: Problem Solving and Practicing Eye-Hand Coordination

Fichas en la lata: Solucionar problemas y practicar la coordinación entre ojos y manos

Crazy Cups: Stacking and Unstacking

Vasos locos: Apilar y desapilar

Drumming Up Fun: Controlling Muscles and Emotions

Diversión con tambores: Controlar los músculos y las emociones

Egg Carton Game: Picking Up and Placing

Juegos con una caja para huevos: Recoger y colocar

Grab It and Name It: Recognizing Objects by Touch

Tómalo y nómbralo: Reconocer objetos a través del tacto

Hat Head: Choosing, Describing, and Pretending

Sombreros puestos: Elegir y describir

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Hinging on Play: Using Small Muscles and Being Curious

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Guitarra casera: Rasgar y jalar

Imitation Play: Leading and Following

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Loud and Soft Sounds: Listening to and Creating Sounds

Sonidos fuertes y suaves: Escuchar y crear sonidos

Making Instruments: Listening and Moving to the Beat

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March to the Drummer: Marching, Rocking, and Swinging

Marchar al ritmo del tambor: Marchar, mecerse y balancearse

Nesting Cans: Planning, Experimenting, Learning

Colocar latas unas dentro de otras: Planificar, experimentar, aprender

Note Card Book: Using Small Muscles and Telling Stories

Libros con tarjetas: Usar los músculos pequeños y contar cuentos

Painting in a Bag: Exploring Textures and Using Small Muscles

Pintar en una bolsa: Explorar texturas y usar los músculos pequeños

Paper Play: Crumpling and Filling

Juego con papel: Arrugar y llenar

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Hablar en paralelo y hablarse a sí mismo: Escuchar y aprender palabras nuevas

Playing Catch: Tossing and Taking Turns

Jugar a atrapar: Aventar y tomar turnos

Pretend Picnic: Imagining and Showing Understanding

Jugar al día de campo: Imaginar y demostrar entendimiento

Pull Toys: Walking and Using Large Muscles

Juguetes para jalar: Caminar y usar los músculos grandes

Puzzle Box: Gaining Self-Confidence and Solving Problems

Caja de rompecabezas: Ganar autoconfianza y solucionar problemas

Rainmaker: Experimenting and Touching

Palos de lluvia: Experimentar y tocar



Scribbling With Crayons: Taking Turns and Creating

Garabatear con crayones: Tomar turnos y crear

Sensory Box: Filling, Sharing, Pouring, and Exploring

Caja sensorial: Llenar, compartir, volcar y explorar

Shape Sorter Box: Using Small Muscles and Trying Again

Caja clasificadora de formas: Usar músculos pequeños e intentarlo de nuevo

Sock Puppet: Taking Turns and Pretending

Marioneta de calcetín: Tomar turnos y juegos de representación

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Rompecabezas con pelota de tenis: Sacar, hacer pares y pensar

Train Ride: Pretending and Lining Up

Paseo en tren: Juego de representación y hacer fila

Turn-Taking Tub: Giving and Playing

Tomar turnos en la tina: Dar y jugar

Write a Letter: Playing With Language and Using Small Muscles

Escribir una carta: Jugar con el lenguaje y usar los músculos pequeños

Yarn Ball Fun: Catching, Tossing, and Rolling

Diversión con una bola de estambre: Atrapar, aventar y rodar

Zip and Open: Using Fingers and Controlling Small Muscles

Subir y bajar cierres: Usar los dedos y controlar los músculos pequeños

Activity Pages: 24 to 36 Months

Ball Play: Kicking, Tossing, and Catching

Juego con pelotas: Patear, lanzar y atrapar

Basket of Balls: Controlling Actions and Matching

Canasta de pelotas: Controlar acciones y hacer pares

Beading: Using Finger Muscles and Making Patterns

Ensartar con cuentas: Usar los músculos de los dedos y hacer patrones

Bears With Feelings: Pretending and Talking About Emotions

Ositos con sentimientos: Representar y hablar sobre emociones

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Tocando la trompeta en la banda: Jugar juntos y usar los músculos pequeños

Blowing in the Wind: Developing Small Muscles and Experimenting

Moverse con el viento: Desarrollar los músculos pequeños y experimentar



Bowling: Rolling, Aiming, and Making Rules

Jugar a los bolos: Hacer rodar, apuntar y poner reglas

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Vestir al osito: Vestir y representar

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Libro para hacer pares con comidas favoritas: Observar y comprar

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Buscar colores: Aprender palabras y hacer pares

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En la cocina: Ayudar y aprender

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Carretera con bolsas de papel: Uso de los músculos pequeños y juego de planificación

Parachute Play: Controlling Large Muscles and Experimenting

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Family Support for Maternal Depression (PH)

Apoyo familiar para la depresión maternal

Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)

How Am I Feeling? (PH)

¿Cómo me siento?

Stress and Resilience

Coping With Stress (PH)

Cómo hacerle frente al estrés

Relaxation Breathing and Other Ways to Release Stress (PH)

Respiración para relajarse y otras maneras de liberar el estrés

When You're Feeling Lonely (PH)

Cuando usted se siente solo



Substance Abuse in Families With Young Children

Developmental Effects of Substance Use

The Effects of Substance Abuse on Child Development (PH)

Los efectos del abuso de sustancias en el desarrollo infantil

Bereavement and Infant Loss

Grieving After Miscarriage or Stillbirth (PH)

Sufrimiento después de un aborto espontáneo o un bebé que nació sin vida

Grieving for Your Baby (PH)

Sufrimiento por la pérdida de su bebé

Talking About Death

Talking With Your Child About Death (PH)

Hablar con su hijo sobre la muerte

Early Care and Education

Guiding Parents' Search for Child Care

Child Care Options (PH)

Opciones de cuidado infantil

Characteristics of Quality Child Care (PH)

Características de las guarderías de calidad

Evaluating Child Care Settings (PH)

Evaluación de la guardería

Two-Way Sharing About Your Child (PH)

Dos formas de compartir información sobre su hijo

Communicating With Your Caregiver (PH)

La comunicación con la persona que cuida a su hijo

Racial Equity and School Readiness

Bilingualism Support in Early Care and Education Programs

Resources for Families Learning English (PH)

Recursos para familias que están aprendiendo inglés

Relationships With Family and Friends

Valuing Family Diversity

Sensitivity to Family Structure

Learning Family Values

Teaching Children to Value Differences

Learning to Value Diversity (PH)

Aprender a valorar la diversidad

Fatherhood

Your Role as a Dad (PH)

Su papel como padre

Teenage Fathers (PH)

Padres adolescentes

What Moms Should Know About Dads (PH)

Lo que las mamás deben saber sobre los papás

Letter to a Parent Educator

Working With Families Caring for Foster Children

Parenting as a Foster Parent (PH)

Crianza como padres de cuidado temporal

The Importance of Grandparents and Other Relatives

Your Child's Grandparents (PH)

Los abuelos de su hijo

My Thoughts on Being a Grandparent (PH)

Lo que pienso sobre ser abuelo/abuela

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (PH)

Abuelos que crían a sus nietos

Immigrant Families

Bilingual Families: A Special Advantage

Your Child's Rich Multicultural Life (PH)

La riqueza multicultural en la vida de su hijo

At Home in a New Culture (PH)

Su hogar dentro de una nueva cultura

Supporting Families Where Mental Illness Is Present

Supporting Parents With Intellectual Disabilities

Supporting Parents With Physical and Sensory Disabilities

Talking to Your Child About Your Disability (PH)

Cómo hablar con su hijo sobre su discapacidad



Divorce or Separation in Families With Young Children

Divorce Is Difficult, Even for Babies! (PH)

El divorcio es difícil, ¡incluso para los bebés!

Working With Military Families

The Emotional Cycle of Deployments

When the Warning Order Comes: The Emotional Cycle of Deployments (PH)

Cuando llega la orden: el ciclo emocional del despliegue militar

Teen Relationships

The Relationship Spectrum (PH)

El espectro de las relaciones

Reflections of a Healthy Relationship (PH)

Reflexiones sobre una relación sana

The Toddler's Adjustment to the New Baby

Helping Your Toddler Adjust to the New Baby (PH)

Cómo ayudar a su hijo pequeño a adaptarse al nuevo bebé

Young Sibling Relationships

Your Children's Relationships (PH)

Las relaciones de sus hijos

Preparing for and Parenting Multiples

Pregnant With Multiples: What Next? (PH)

Embarazo múltiple: ¿Y después qué?

Getting Ready for Your Multiples (PH)

Preparándose para sus bebés múltiples

Adjusting to Life With Multiples (PH)

Adaptarse a la vida con bebés múltiples

Intimate Partner Violence

When Control Becomes a Pattern (PH)

Cuando el control se convierte en un patrón de conducta

Recreation and Enrichment

Recreation and Enrichment for Families With Young Children

Tracking Our Family's Screen Time (PH)

Ser conscientes del tiempo que nuestra familia pasa frente al la pantalla

Having Fun on the Go With Your Baby (PH)

Salir a divertirse con su bebé

Appendix

Guidance for Using the Parents as Teachers Core Competencies Self-Assessment

Parents as Teachers Core Competencies Self-Assessment

Guidance for Using the Resiliency Quiz
The Resiliency Quiz

Hubs

Process Tools

Parenting Behaviors

Group Connections

Protective Factors

Visit Planning Process

Items that Support the Four Components



Additional Translations

Arabic

Welcome to Parents as Teachers (PH)
What's on Your Mind? Exploring Hopes, Desires, Questions, and Concerns (PH)
Fine SMILE (PH)
Your Baby's Amazing Brain (PH)
Birth to 1½ Months: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)
1½ to 3½ Months: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)
Tummy Time (PH)
3½ to 5½ Months: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)
5½ to 8 Months: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)
8 to 14 Months: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)
14 to 24 Months: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)
Your Toddler Knows Two Languages (PH)
24 to 36 Months: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)

3 Years: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)
Parenting Makes a Difference (PH)
Interacting With Your Child (PH)
Ball Play: Social Turn-Taking and Rolling (AP)
Body Parts: Looking and Listening (AP)
Scribbling With Crayons: Taking Turns and Creating (AP)
Counting: Learning Numbers and Understanding Small Quantities (AP)
Play to Learn: Observing and Responding During Floor Time (AP)
Play Is Learning (PH)
Parenting Around Development (PH)
What is Your Role in Helping Your Child Develop Secure Attachment? (PH)
Positive Discipline (PH)
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Burmese

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Chinese

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Fine SMILE (PH)

Your Baby's Amazing Brain (PH)

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1½ to 3½ Months: What Is Special About This Age? (PH)

Tummy Time (PH)

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French

Welcome to Parents as Teachers (PH)
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 Coping With Stress (PH)
 Resources for Families Learning English (PH)
 Having Fun on the Go With Your Baby (PH)

Nepali

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 Resources for Families Learning English (PH)
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German

Fine SMILE (PH)

Play Is Learning (PH)

Korean

Play Is Learning (PH)

Turkish

Play Is Learning (PH)

Greek

Play Is Learning (PH)

Portuguese

Play Is Learning (PH)

SAMPLE



FOUNDATIONAL *personal visit plan 1*

First

Preparation for visit

- > Read parent educator resources:
 - [The Value of Play](#)
 - [Looking at Development](#)
 - [The Parent Educator's Role in the Personal Visit](#)
 - [Recognizing, Creating, and Adapting Routines](#)
 - [Family Well-Being](#)
- > Choose from parent handouts:
 - [Welcome to Parents as Teachers](#)
 - [Family Journal](#)
 - [Play Is Learning](#)
 - [What Is Special About This Age?](#) or [Your Unborn Baby's Development](#)
 - [Routines and Your Baby](#)
- > Choose activity page:
 - [Play to Learn](#)
 - [Roll Away Your Worries](#)
- > Gather additional materials, if needed:
 - Book basket

- > Additional resources from *Foundational 2 Curriculum: 3 Years Through Kindergarten*:
 - Parent educator resource: [Learning Through Play](#)
 - Activity page: [Block Fun](#)

- > Family last name(s): _____ Week of pregnancy: _____
- > Child's name: _____ DOB: _____ Age/adjusted age: _____
- > Child's name: _____ DOB: _____ Age/adjusted age: _____
- > Date of the visit: _____ Time of the visit: _____ Location: _____
- > Goal setting: Y N Review of progress on goals: Y N
- > Screening or assessment tools to be used: _____
- > Other program responsibilities: _____

Review

- > Familiarize yourself with the family's recruitment information.

Consult

- > Talk with your supervisor about the program's expectations of you and your role with families.

Check in

- > Ask clarifying questions (such as directions and participants), describe the visit and ask if there is anything else the family would like to include.

Visit overview

Opening

- > **Connect, reflect, agree**
- > **Introduce the program**

Parent-Child Interaction

- > **Parent-child activity:** Introduce and involve family in [Play to Learn](#) or [Block Fun](#) activity.
- > **Play:** Connect key points from the play resources to the parent-child interaction.
- > **Parents' role:** Discuss the parents' role in parent-child activities during visits.
- > **Book sharing:** Establish a pattern for book sharing.

Development-Centered Parenting

- > **Family routines:** Learn about the family and its routines.
- > **Development-centered parenting:** Connect key points from the parent educator resource [Recognizing, Creating, and Adapting Routines](#) to the family's routines.

Family Well-Being

- > **Family dynamics:** Learn about the family and how it functions.
- > **Family well-being:** Connect key points from the family well-being resources to the family's environment.

Closing

- > **Review, revisit, evaluate, share, affirm, and look ahead**



Opening

Intent: What will we focus on at this visit?

- > Introduce yourself and program services.
- > Establish the routine and expectations of a personal visit.

Connect, reflect, agree

Connect by introducing yourself.

- > Acknowledge all family members who are present. Offer gratitude for inviting you into their home.
- > Explain why working with families is important to you. State your anticipation for getting to know the family.
- > Check the parents', child(ren)'s, and family's states. "What has your day been like so far?"
- > Observe where the parents sit and, with their permission, sit at the same level.
- > Allow the child(ren) to approach you. Ask permission to touch or hold the baby.

Reflect on the parents' and child(ren)'s life experiences. Ask:

- > "How did your baby/child get her name?"
- > "Tell me about the day your baby arrived."
- > Build insight by listening for keys to family history, values, and the health of mother and baby at delivery.

Prenatal > Ask, "How are you feeling about being pregnant?"

Agree on what will happen during the visit.

- > "We plan to learn about each other, discuss the program, and do an activity that shows how your child(ren) learns through play."
- > "You mentioned (from the check-in) that you wanted to discuss _____."
- > "What else would you like to talk about or address?"

Introduce the program.

- > "How did you hear about this program?"
- > "What do you hope to gain from participating in this program?"
- > Introduce the focus and services of the program – personal visits, group connections, opportunities for screenings, links to resources.
- > The parent handout [Welcome to Parents as Teachers](#) can be used to discuss expectations for yourself and the family.



Gauge parents' involvement in the topic. Adjust to meet their needs or interests.

Listen and observe for information that may assist in future planning and/or completion of a family assessment.



Parent-Child Interaction

Intent: What will we focus on at this visit?

- > Encourage parent-child interaction through play.

Parent-child activity

Parent-child activity page: [Play to Learn](#), [Roll Away Your Worries](#), or [Block Fun](#)

- > Explain that on every visit parents will have an opportunity to observe and support their child(ren)'s development.
- > Invite the parents or child to bring a favorite toy for the activity. "I brought some blocks and books to share too."
- > Partner with parents to define the play space (with a drop cloth, if desired). "Where would you like to play with your child?"
- > Encourage everyone to sit at the child(ren)'s level on the floor or wherever they can be comfortable.
- > Lay out the materials and suggest that the parents observe a bit. "Let's see what she does with this ..."
- > Use the activity page to describe the activity and explain the rationale. Encourage the parents to join the child's play. Recognize and affirm their efforts.



Take note of the informal resources the family uses.

Prenatal > Explain to the parents that on every visit they will have an opportunity to do an activity that will help them prepare for the new baby.

Play

This discussion provides the rationale for parent-child interaction and establishes the basis for continuing these interactions on every visit.

Prompts or questions to understand the family's perspective and practice of the topic:

- > "What are some things you like to play with your child(ren)?"
- > "What do you think your child(ren) is learning when you play with him?"
- > Parent educator resource(s): [The Value of Play](#) or [Learning Through Play](#)

Key points about play from parent educator resource:

- > Young children learn best through active play.
- > As children explore, they learn about objects and how to make them do what they want.
- > Play helps children develop muscles as they grasp toys and move to get playthings out of reach.
- > As children use all of their senses to play, their brains develop in many areas.
- > Repetition reinforces learning. Young children repeat their play over and over because they continue to construct knowledge through that play experience.



Parent handout(s): [Play Is Learning](#) and [What's Special About This Age?](#)

Prenatal > Ask, “Have you found ways to play with your baby? If so, what?” > Touch, sound, and movement stimulate your baby and may cause her to respond.

Parents’ role

Discuss with parents their role in the visit. Help them understand the benefit of parent-child interactions and how they play a significant part.

- > “You are your child’s first and most important teacher.”
- > Motivate parents to participate and sustain their interactions.
- > “Your child(ren) is developing a sense that she is valued, safe, and loved when you play with her.”
- > “As you talk, your child(ren) hears and learns language. Older children repeat the language they hear in their environment. They gain an understanding of the words they hear as you play together.”
- > “Your child learns more from you than anyone else.”
- > “Your child(ren) plays longer when you play with her.”

Book sharing

Discuss with parents the importance of book sharing. Establish a book sharing routine within the visit.

- > Encourage the parents and child(ren) to choose a book from the basket. Let them know that one of the books does not have words and could be shared by just talking about the pictures.
- > “Sharing books is important to your child’s development because ...”
- > For older children, model using open-ended questions to stimulate conversation.

Development-Centered Parenting

Intent: What will we focus on at this visit?

- > Begin to learn about the family’s daily routines.

Family routines

Learn about the family’s routines, such as mealtime and bedtime, by facilitating a conversation.

- > “What does a typical day look like for your family?”
- > “What’s your favorite part of the day?”

Development-centered parenting

Prompts or questions to understand the family’s perspective and practice of the topic:

- > “How have you changed since you’ve become a parent (as your child has grown)?
- > “Have there been any adjustments you had to make that you weren’t expecting?”





Parent educator resource: [Recognizing, Creating, and Adapting Routines](#)

Key points from parent educator resource:

- > Children feel secure when their lives are predictable.
- > Consistency is important because children feel secure when they know what to expect.
- > Parenting changes over time to accommodate the child's developmental needs.

Parent handout(s): [Routines and Your Baby](#)

Family Well-Being

Intent: What will we focus on at this visit?

- > Begin to learn about the family's environments.

Family dynamics

Learn about the family dynamics such as family members, favorite activities, ways of interacting, and child-rearing responsibilities by facilitating a conversation.

- > "Tell me about your family."
- > "Who does your child(ren) take after?"

Family environments

Prompts or questions to understand the family's perspective and practice of the topic:

- > "Where are the comfortable spaces in your neighborhood to play?"
- > "Where do you play in your home?"
- > "What type of family activities does your family enjoy?"

Prenatal > Ask, "How does your work/home environment support your pregnancy?" > Prompt the discussion with questions about health care access, safe conditions, or emotional supports.

Parent educator resource(s) or other materials: [Family Well-Being](#)

Key points from parent educator resource:

- > Family well-being tells us how people perceive their lives are going from their own perspective.
- > The well-being of a child's parents and other family members have a direct impact on the healthy development of their child.

Parent handout(s):





Closing

Review, revisit, evaluate, share, affirm, and look ahead

Review.

- > Present parents with the family journal. Explain its purpose.
- > Give parents the [Activity Page](#) and remind them to repeat the activity between visits.
- > Restate a key point about play.

Prenatal > Restate key points about prenatal play.

Revisit.

- > Follow up on parent actions: “You mentioned that you are going to ...”
- > State parent educator actions: “I will ...”

Evaluate the time spent together.

- > “How do you think our time went today?” or “Which part of today was most valuable for you?”

Share group connections/community events.

- > Invite the family to attend the next group connection.
- > Ask if the parents know of any upcoming family-friendly neighborhood events.

Affirm strengths of the family.

- > Thank the parents for participating.
- > Share a specific strength you observed in each family member.

Look ahead.

- > Schedule the next visit.
- > Let the parents know the focus of the next visit.
- > “I look forward to learning from your insight and sharing information in our visits.”





ACTIVITY *page*

Prenatal

What do we have?

- > Family Journal
- > Baby pictures of older siblings (optional)
- > Poems, songs, or favorite children's books

Book sharing

When should you start to read to your baby? Now. If your baby has older siblings, read their favorite books to him.

What are some favorite children's stories that you remember? Try to find copies of them.

Read your journal to your baby. Think about how you were feeling then, and how you are feeling now.

Your Baby Can Hear: Listening to the Family

How do we do it?

1. Can you believe that your baby can now hear? He is listening to family conversations. He hears your voice best and, of course, most often.
2. Encourage family members to talk to your baby. They can rest their heads on a pillow in your lap and talk to your tummy. It will be fun for them to choose a favorite story to read or a favorite song to sing every day to their baby.
3. Have you shared with your other children that they are going to be big brothers or sisters? Show them their baby pictures. "Can you believe you were once that little?" Now that you are showing, it will be easier for them to understand the concept of a new baby – and, as an added bonus, your baby can hear their voices when you all talk about him!
4. Your baby will startle at loud noises. He is listening to all conversations. He will be upset by arguments and disagreements.

What's in it for us?

- > Your baby will recognize the voices he hears most often. Research has shown that a baby will turn to the mother's voice right after birth.
- > His brain is growing at an amazing rate.
- > He can hear and he can see bright lights. His taste buds are developing. He is learning through all his senses.



Taking care of you

When you feel calm, so does your baby. When you feel tense, so does your baby. Discuss scary dreams with your partner or friends. This may be a way for your mind to deal with fears.

Remember to consider how to handle change and stress.



Parenting behavior

Communicating: Your baby is listening to you as you talk every day. He can hear you talk, read out loud, sing, and breathe. He can also hear your heart beat.

What I noticed about my baby ...

Do you notice movements when there are loud noises or bright lights?

What I noticed about myself ...

How are the prenatal doctor visits going? What is the doctor sharing with you?

Continued learning

Practice singing lullabies to your baby. Sing favorites you remember or discover new ones and memorize them. If possible, download some on your phone or music player and sing along. Think about which lullaby you will hum in the middle of the night.

Your baby is listening to you all the time. Have you listened to your baby's heart beat? It's amazing, isn't it?

What I noticed about those around me ...

How are family members communicating with the baby?



ACTIVITY *page*

5½ to 8 months

What do we have?

- > 2 zip-top freezer bags
- > Objects that float (lids, sponges, or corks)
- > Duct tape
- > A tray with sides (optional)
- > Cardboard chubby book, cloth book, or vinyl book

Book sharing

During book play, let your baby explore and turn pages as she chooses. She may mouth a book, or turn from the back to the front. That's OK. Talk about the pictures she sees. What is happening in the book?

Shared Attention With a Pat Mat: Touching and Observing

How do we do it?

1. Create a pat mat by filling a bag ⅓ full with water. Drop in easy-to-see objects that float.
2. Tape the bag closed. Seal another bag around it and place it on the tray.
3. You can place your baby in a high chair or on the floor – anywhere she can reach the pat mat.
4. Encourage your baby to touch the pat mat and make the objects move.
5. Talk with her about what she is doing, feeling, and seeing. For example: “You are making waves. See the pink lid go up and down? How does that feel? Oooh, the bag is warm.”
6. Allow your baby to play as long as she is interested. Repeat this activity again and again over the next few days.

What's in it for us?

- > **Cognitive:** Your baby is learning that she can make things move. This will lead to understanding cause and effect later on.
- > **Social-emotional:** You and your baby are looking together at the objects. This is called shared attention. It builds attachment because she learns how special she is to you.
- > As your baby does things over and over, her brain creates memory pathways.

(child skill or parent skill defined by the parent/parent educator)

Safety tip

Plastic bags may cause choking or suffocation if your baby puts them in her mouth. Gently guide her actions and keep her safe while she is exploring.





Parenting behavior

Communicating: When you talk to her about what she is doing, your baby learns words for her actions.

What I noticed about my baby ...

What I noticed about myself ...

Continued learning

Everyday items in your home and outdoors are new to your baby. Talk about what you and your baby are doing when you diaper, dress, and feed her. Take advantage of these one-on-one times together to build her understanding of language.



What do we have?

- > Contact paper
- > Lightweight “found objects” or toys (sticks, leaves, feathers, magazine pictures, and so on)
- > Scissors
- > Toddler book

Book sharing

As you read together, let your child choose the book she wants to read. Establish a routine. Perhaps before bed your child can choose two books.

Snuggle up and talk about the books. Perhaps a book about nature and the world around us would be fun. Talk about whether the objects shown in the book would stick on the contact paper.



Sticky Paper Collage: Creating and Working on Eye-Hand Coordination

How do we do it?

1. Attach a strip of contact paper as long as your child is tall to a window. Put the sticky side out and make sure your child can reach it easily.
2. Ask your child to help you choose objects to attach.
3. Show how one of the objects will stick to the paper. Observe your child as she approaches the sticky paper.
4. Use open-ended questions and parallel talk. “How does that feel?” “What should we do with the leaf we found?” “Will it stick?” “You are putting the leaf on the paper.” “It did stick!”
5. Leave the strip for a day or so. Your child may put objects on and take them off. What other objects will you and your child find to add to your collage?

What’s in it for us?

- > **Cognitive:** Your child is experimenting and exploring with textures. First she is discovering what feels sticky. Second is the awareness that things will stick to sticky surfaces.
- > **Cognitive:** She is learning cause and effect and discovering that some things stick more easily than others. Lighter items will stick; heavier ones will not.
- > Weight, texture, and other characteristics are all ways to understand differences.

(child skill or parent skill defined by the parent/parent educator)

Your child’s brain

Your child’s brain is sorting out the different sensations she is learning about.



Safety tip

Inspect the items you find. Make sure they are safe – avoid things that are small enough for your child to swallow or that have sharp edges.





Parenting behavior

Designing: You are giving your child opportunities to explore the world she lives in. As you share in your child's sensory exploration, you are supporting a budding scientist!

Continued learning

Take time to see the world as your child does. Observe when you are walking into the grocery store or when you notice bumble bees on the flowers.

Wrap some tape sticky side out around your socks and go for a walk in the grass. Did little seeds or blades of grass stick?

Your child learns about the concept of weight through everyday activities. As you bring in the groceries, she can lift bags. Are they heavy?

What I noticed about my child ...

What I noticed about myself ...

SAMPLE



Language Development: 8 to 14 Months

Babies' comprehension of language, or receptive language, is usually ahead of their ability to produce language (called their expressive or productive language). This means they can make sense of more than they can say.

Comprehension first

This production “lag” is typically also true of adults trying to learn a second language. But young children have certain key advantages over the adult language learner. Neuroscientists report that infants' brains are capable of receiving enormous amounts of information and finding the regular patterns contained within it.

After 6 months, babies have formed “perceptual maps” that direct them toward the sounds of the language(s) they hear most frequently and away from sounds of other languages. Around 8 months of age, babies can learn to play simple, imitative, action-word games such as pat-a-cake and so-big.

Besides helping babies learn to imitate actions, which they can then transfer

into imitating words, these games also teach turn-taking, an integral part of the communication process. They also aid in developing shared attention because both babies and parents are focusing on the same thing during the games.

The power of gestures

The use of gestures is an important step in language development during

Parent handouts

[8 to 14 Months: Your Baby's Language Development](#)

[What to Expect When Your Baby Talks to You](#)

[Words Your Child Understands](#)

[Your Child's First Words](#)

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[Sing a Song](#)

[Unwrapping a Toy](#)

[Roller Book](#)

[Zip-Top Bag Book](#)

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this age span. Babies communicate intentionally by waving, reaching, nodding, pulling, showing, giving, and, finally, pointing. During this age, babies usually learn the universal gesture of putting their hands in the air to indicate that they want to be picked up and held.

These gestures are very important for language development. Gestures can help babies communicate despite the production lag – they can use their hands to “say” what they need even if their mouths aren’t quite ready. Some parents may worry that teaching a baby more gestures will delay real words. But studies show that gesturing can actually give children an advantage in the longer term: The more children use gestures at 14 months, the larger their productive vocabularies at 3.5 years (Rowe, Özçaliskan, & Goldin-Meadow, 2008).

Pointing is the gesture most indicative that words are coming. It can have several meanings for babies. They can use it to get a caregiver’s attention; to have their needs met (“My cup is empty. Please give me more juice.”); or to show (“Look at that neat truck on the table.”)

When babies hear their parents talking, their speech is a nonstop stream of sound. Babies are learning to fish out individual words from ordinary speech around them. For them to learn the

names of things, they have to pay attention to the same objects that their parents are naming. This shared attention is especially useful when babies learn to point. Half of the battle is won when a child points to an object. He is already interested in it. And he has learned that he can communicate his interest to others. Parents can simply name the object to which the child is pointing. When the baby points to the cat, his parents should say, “Kitty, kitty. I see the kitty. Pretty kitty.”

Developments in babbling

Babbling continues during this stage of development but takes on a different form called variegated babbling. In **variegated babbling**, the baby does not simply repeat the same sound over and over (such as “nananana”), but uses several different sounds at the same time (such as “nabegaba”). Variegated babbling includes a wider range of sounds than simple babbling, especially more consonant sounds. But recent research indicates that, on average, babies have a more limited set of babbling sounds than we originally assumed (Siegler, DeLoache & Eisenberg, 2011).

Variegated babbling soon takes on inflections and intonations that make it sound very speech-like. This type of

babbling is called **jargon**. Jargon often begins during this time and, for some children, it continues until 18 or 24 months of age, long after they begin to use words. Some babies intersperse words among the jargon. They add voice inflections and gestures to make their meaning known. This is perfectly normal. Parents should respond as if they understand what the baby is saying. Other babies will use jargon for a much shorter time, dropping it soon after real words appear.

Many first words appear at about 12 months of age. Most babies will begin to use “mama” and “dada” as specific names for their parents sometime during this timeframe. Other first words typically begin to appear somewhere between 8 and 15 months of age. (Eighteen months is the latest age single words should appear.) Therefore, some children may, but others may not, be using some real words at this time.

Expressive language is the sounds that babies make in order to communicate. It includes crying, babbling, jargon talk, and true words, depending on the age and development of the child.

Whether or not a baby is talking, he should be showing signs of **receptive language**. He should be able to



understand some language that is directed at him. He should respond by stopping the behavior (although not every time) when he is told, “No, no,” although he may not understand the meaning of no. By the end of this period, he should also be playing such games as peek-a-boo, pat-a-cake, and so-big. He should sometimes be able to follow simple directions related to what he is doing at the time. If he’s playing ball, he should be able to follow the direction, “Get the ball.”

“Research indicates that the sensitive periods for receptive language and speech production peak at 9 months of age” (Mangione, 2014; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007) although they continue well into 6 years of age. Babies will be able to understand simple words that they encounter every day. Words they understand will be associated with things and people they see every day (cookie, juice, bottle, mama, dada, and the names of siblings and pets). Parents can use gestures to demonstrate and help them understand the meaning of words. Face-to-face talking is also very important in learning language. A baby’s brain makes connections for receiving and expanding language best when the baby can see as well as hear people talking to him.

Between 8 and 12 months of age, babies often begin a new stage of language development called echolalia,

the parrot-like imitation of sounds, syllables, and words. Just as a parrot can mimic words but doesn’t really understand what it is saying, a child who is using **echolalia** is doing so without really understanding what he is saying. Many of the imitations will, however, be fairly accurate representations.

Your role as a parent educator

Parents are always excited when their baby’s language abilities begin to emerge. You can model many activities they can use to promote language learning long before the baby speaks any real words.

Encourage the parents’ use of gestures, facial expressions, simple, descriptive sentences, and face-to-face talking. Suggest shared attention as a way parents can help their baby learn the names of objects and actions. Use the parent handout [Words Your Child Understands](#). Model it by reading a book or verbally examining a toy with the baby.

Parents can participate in the steps to their baby’s first words more intentionally when they understand the normal sequence of language development. By acquainting them with the various forms of infant communication that comprise receptive and expressive language, you will equip parents to recognize and encourage their baby’s early attempts at understanding and speaking words.

Advise parents to respond to their baby’s vocalizations, however unintelligible they may be. They should act as if they understand what the baby is saying in order to keep the communication going.

Encourage parents to use and teach their young children gestures for everyday objects and needs (e.g., more, bottle). Explain that using gestures can help their baby feel less frustrated when trying to communicate. Gestures give babies a way to express themselves before their mouths catch up with their minds. For more information about teaching babies to gesture, see the parent educator resource [Baby Signs](#) and the parent handouts [Communicating With Your Child Through Signs](#) and [What to Expect When Your Baby Talks to You](#).

Don’t forget to tell parents about the power of nursery rhymes to promote the child’s language development at every stage of development. Encourage them to use the parent handouts [Rhymes and Songs](#) to make a nursery rhyme book.



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SAMPLE



1½ to 3½ Months: Your Baby's Motor Development

Playing with your baby has many benefits. Tummy time helps strengthen his neck and shoulder muscles. This reduces his risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and improves his ability to control his head movements. Offering him toys helps him coordinate his eyes and hands.

Look for your baby to:	What is happening and how you can help:	What I saw:
Have more control over his head and body movements.	> Give your baby room to move around and strengthen his muscles. As his brain matures, he will overcome his reflexes and start to make more voluntary movements.	
Lift his head when lying on his stomach and move his head from side to side.	> When he is awake and alert, place your baby, stomach down, on a blanket on the floor for "tummy time." Repeat tummy time for a few minutes several times a day. > He is starting to be curious about what is around him. Put interesting things in front of him to look at. This increases his head control and offers a different visual perspective. > Another way to do tummy time is to lie on your back with him on your chest so he can look at your face.	
Kick and push with his legs.	> After your baby has had some tummy time on the floor, turn him onto his back and let him exercise his leg muscles. This will improve his coordination. > Put your hands against his feet so he can push away from them.	
Bat at toys with one hand.	> Safely hang toys or a crib gym where your baby can bat at the dangling objects. Change the objects often to keep him interested.	
Bring both hands together.	> He is beginning to coordinate his movements. Offer safe, small toys to your baby – hold them at the middle of his body to make it easy for him to grab them.	



Look for your baby to:	What is happening and how you can help:	What I saw:
Study faces and track moving objects.	> Make sure there is enough light in the room for him to see clearly. > Hold an object 12 to 15 inches from his eyes and let him study it. Slowly move it a little to each side, then up and down. > Your baby's more mature vision is able to notice details and motion.	
Hold his head steady when carried against your shoulder.	> Carry your baby around to help strengthen his neck and head muscles. > Using a variety of positions will make his upper body stronger and improve his balance.	
Enjoy your touch and be calmed by it.	> When you touch, rub, and gently massage your baby, his brain is stimulated and makes more connections.	

REFLECTION

Take time to watch your baby.

What motor skills is your baby working on?

What kinds of touch does your baby enjoy?

In what ways does your baby seem to be "waking up" to his world?



How Young Children Approach Learning

Parents often think their first baby is a genius. They aren't completely wrong. Any adult who learned as much as quickly and as well as an infant would almost have to be a genius.

Babies are incredible natural learners, masters of gathering and applying new information. The aspects of how they approach learning can be thought of in three clusters:

1. To begin
2. To stay in
3. To dig deep and expand out

All of the learning approaches are so natural to babies that a large part of

parents' job is to just not get in the way. That can be challenging because infants' early communication, motor, and social abilities are so tiny that parents might not notice their child's earliest attempts to communicate or realize that she is trying to move her arm in an early attempt to touch something interesting.

Parents and caregivers who are sensitive to intent on the part of an infant – who can notice that the child

is interested, trying to move, or trying to communicate and who can help that infant reach goals, or see what she is trying to see, or get what she wants – are on the path to raising a child who is a capable learner thrilled by the process of learning.

Newborns come into the world with extremely limited abilities to do anything, and within three years they will have mastered the basics of moving around

Parent handouts

[Approaches to Learning in the Early Years](#)

[Learning to Learn](#)

[Learning Through Movement](#)

[Your Baby Is Learning to Communicate](#)

[Babbling](#)

[What to Expect When Your Baby Talks to You](#)

[Words Your Child Understands](#)

[Your Child's First Words](#)

[Creating a Safe Home for Your Child](#)

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the world (locomotion), of socially connecting with the people in their world, of using successful strategies to solve problems, and of speaking whatever language or languages are being used around them. Each infant has taken in vast amounts of information and transformed herself from a baby who could eat, cry, sleep, and barely control her own gaze to a toddler who can run, jump, speak, get people's attention in many ways, and communicate her wants, needs, thoughts, and emotions.

They learn many other things and, depending on their culture and personal interests, they may know more or less about books, physical objects, neighborhood geography, or television programs, for example. But all reasonably healthy infants will master locomotion language, thinking, and social skills, and it will take about three years of intensive learning, using all three clusters of approaches, to do so.

A baby's intrinsic drive to learn how to move and speak will allow her parents to get a strong sense of her strengths and weaknesses as a learner without having to struggle with motivating her.

Of course, temperament plays a role in how children approach learning too. Even

Goodness of fit

Even adults who are great with children have an easier time with some than others. A large part of that has to do with how well the adult's temperament meshes with the child's temperament.

An easygoing adult may be exactly who an anxious child needs to guide her through math, whereas a nervous adult may just make things worse. This match between adult and child is known as **goodness of fit**. We've all known examples of bad goodness of fit: the wildly rebellious teenager and the super-controlling parent who seem to spiral into a war of wills; the fussy infant and the super-nervous first-time mom.

Having a positive goodness of fit can make teaching very easy. The child sees her parent as a secure base, and this allows her to confidently explore her world. It can make it easier for parents to notice how the child responds to the environment – what interests her, what distracts her, what helps her persist in trying, what gives her the confidence to attempt new things. Poor goodness of fit can make every aspect of teaching and encouraging an infant harder.

Problematic goodness of fit can be addressed if the parent notices what is happening. If someone (either the parent or a professional), is able to analyze the parent-child interactions, then parents can consciously improve those interactions.

very young infants thrive on different amounts of stimulation, differ on how likely they are to keep trying in the face of failure, and vary on their willingness to try new things. One 5-month-old will try to sit up every waking hour of the day for weeks until she masters it; another will seem almost uninterested in practicing the skill until within the space of two or three days he is suddenly sitting. For

more information, refer to the parent educator resource [Temperament](#).

To begin

Initiative, curiosity, eagerness to learn

Infants are ready “to begin” learning everything. They are curious about their world and so eager to learn that the fact that they don't have the receptive

For additional examples of approaches to learning across all four domains, look for the skills marked with asterisks in the [Milestones by Age](#).

language comprehension to understand adults' encouragement is not even a drawback. It is probably best to assume that infants are ready to begin learning anything and everything their caregivers do or say.

To foster their baby's initiative, curiosity, and eagerness to learn, parents can give her freedom to practice and surround her with a world that is safe to explore, as explained in the parent educator resource [*Designing and Guiding as Your Baby Grows*](#). Other parenting behaviors are integral as well – for example, parents must notice when their baby needs help and also lets her do things on her own when she can. Being aware of the earliest indications that an infant is learning a new skill is very helpful.

Each of the approaches to learning clusters promotes development in all four domains. However, in an effort to show how each approach evolves over time, examples are offered primarily in the domains of language and motor.

To begin: Language skills

An infant has already begun to learn language before she is born. By around the seventh month of pregnancy, she can hear voices and is learning to prefer her parents' voices and to recognize familiar language – like a book read every day during the last prenatal months (DeCasper & Spence, 1986). Infants

Contingency

Scientists examining language learning have found that high contingency – the link between a speaker's utterance and a listener's response – is key. The easier it is for an infant to make the connection between making a sound or gesture and getting a desired response from an adult, the quicker learning happens. If her mother gets excited immediately after the baby says something like "Ma," she is more likely to say it again.

Discipline works in much the same way. The more closely undesired behavior is linked with consequences, the more likely the consequences will work.

Researchers have been able to get infants to produce more mature language sounds by coaching parents on which exact noises to praise (e.g., Zelazo, Kearsley, & Ungerer, 2014). By equipping babies with microphones and mothers with ear phones, researchers were able to tell when babies made a noises more typical of older infants and tell mothers to quickly praise the babies as if they had done something amazing. Within a session, babies sounded like they were weeks older than they actually were.

As parents are watching their children learn new motor and language skills, they need to keep in mind that feedback needs to be immediate. Being with the infant while distracted by electronic devices may take away many of the learning benefits of spending time with their child.

signal interest by mimicking (even newborns can copy facial expressions, Meltzoff & Moore, 1977, 1997) and by being relaxed and looking or trying to look at what is interesting.

Older infants will reach for or point at interesting things. All of these are opportunities for helping them begin to learn language – repeat what is said more than once, point to what they appear to be interested in, and label it. Younger infants are often better at

signaling disinterest by looking away, getting restless, physically tensing, fussing, or crying, than at signaling active interest. Parents' reaction to such fussiness will depend on the situation. If a mother is trying to get out the door, for example, she may ignore her baby's fussing; however, if she is practicing language skills, like "da-da-da" sounds, fussiness is a signal that her baby is no longer learning and something should change.

Throughout language learning, it is important to pay attention to what the child *could* mean or want or be interested in, because they are not very skilled communicators yet. Parents can help children become skilled communicators by being excellent at understanding what they mean and by being good examples. Infants signal their interest to begin learning differently with age. Newborns, for example, do it by staying calm, by mimicking adults, and by occasionally managing to get their eye gaze in the right direction. Slightly older infants begin to make sounds for “fun” and are better at neck and eye control, so they are better at looking where they want. By 5 or 6 months of age, babies will be babbling (making the same noise over and over), playing with how high, low, and loudly they can vocalize, and beginning to point – this is an excellent beginning for learning word meanings.

From then on, babies will be working to master their first words (at around 1 year.) The signal that a child is about to begin learning grammar is when she begins to combine words into two- and three-word strings. Throughout infancy, she will be learning about the rules of conversation, including:

- > Taking turns.
- > Understanding when it is OK to be loud.
- > Speaking to strangers in polite ways.

- > Looking others in the eye while speaking.

At all ages and stages of language development, comprehension precedes production. Babies can understand much more than they can produce. This means that we can’t always observe infants as they begin to learn a new word or language skill. (It also means we have to be careful of what we produce!)

To begin: Motor skills

Many infants switch their focus back and forth between developing motor skills and language skills. Just as they seem ready to master their first word, they may stop and master taking solo steps. This can be frustrating, but parents need to be flexible and realize that the motor and language skills will be mastered eventually.

There are two different areas of motor skills: Fine motor skills involve manipulating things with hands and fingers, and gross motor skills involve locomotion or moving through the world. Fine motor skills begin with some arm control and proceed through reaching, pointing, grasping, manipulating objects, scribbling, coloring, and writing.

Gross motor skills begin with head control and rolling and proceed through scooting, crawling, walking, running, and skipping. Each different skill represents a new domain of learning which requires

that the child “begin” in order. Infants are very motivated to develop motor skills. They are excited to do what older people around them do. They want to get across the room to examine the interesting dust bunny under the bookcase. They need to put anything they can into their mouths. So the vast majority of the time the parenting challenge as the infant begins to learn is to provide a safe environment for exploration.

Many motor skills are developed long before a baby has learned any words, so it is not really possible to actively provide motivation or explanation. Instead, parents’ main role will be to guide and protect and to seek out challenging yet safe places for their baby to develop. In order to do that well, parents need to be tuned in to what their baby can do and what she is likely to do next (so it’s helpful for parent educators to be familiar with the [Milestones](#) in the ebiz portal). Many accidents happen just as the baby acquires a new skill; her parents may not be used to her moving in a new way, and she isn’t used to paying attention to things like how high the couch is or whether the stairs start right in front of her or two feet away.

To stay in

Focus, persistence, engagement

While babies don’t need much encouragement to try reaching and



moving, many toddlers do need encouragement to put their mind to new things. Some children don't mind making mistakes; others absolutely hate doing things wrong. Some parents' challenge will be getting an anxious child to relax and persist long enough to master new motor skills like hopping on one foot or skipping. Some children get frustrated easily and will need encouragement to stick with it to learn.

Parents can be a lifelong help to their toddlers by teaching them the value of persistence in learning. Motor skills learning is a great time to teach persistence, whether or not they are tempted to give up quickly; explicitly helping them see their progress is a great life lesson. "See, you couldn't skip last week at all when you first tried, but after all that practice you can skip across the room." The sooner children learn that skill is acquired by practice, not by natural talent (also known as a growth mindset), the sooner they will become skilled learners.

Family culture sends children the message of whether it is sometimes OK to bore adults to pieces while mastering incredibly difficult skills like reaching, speaking, running, and skipping. It really does take hundreds of hours of practice. Each little skill must be practiced over and over – standing up and sitting down on a parent's lap while holding her hands

is incredibly important practice for little legs, they have to get strong and skilled to master walking in a year.

Adults are always teaching children about the value of activities and, consequently, they need to be careful that they don't teach messages like "give up early and often." Adults may feel the need to see every animal on a visit to the zoo (those outings can get expensive!) However, many 3-year-olds are absolutely content taking the whole morning to only see penguins, polar bears, and elephants. It's important to realize that allowing them to pay attention to things for as long as they are willing to is developing lifelong learning skills.

To stay in: Language skills

Parents play a crucial role in helping their child stay engaged in learning language. In the beginning, their primary role is to provide lots of examples of speech for the baby to build vocabulary. The more a parent talks to a baby, the bigger her vocabulary will be in school (e.g., Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2012; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013; Hart & Risley, 1995.) All babies understand far more language than they can produce; on average, babies' understanding is about a month ahead of their production (Benedict, 1979).

Parents can help their baby persist through the frustrations of learning to use

mouth and throat muscles to skillfully speak by giving her lots of language to think about and practice. Parents can also be emotionally positive about what the child manages to produce – it can be frustrating for the young speaker and the parents when they can't understand what is being said, but if the parents can be enthusiastic and positive while trying to decipher what their child meant, it will encourage persistence. Being as non-judgmental and active in "conversations" with the child as possible is similar to providing a safe place to practice walking. Nobody wants to talk to cranky, impatient people, even babies who are thrilled to be vocalizing and learning new words.

To stay in: Motor skills

In the case of motor skills, it is quite easy to see the huge amount of practice involved in laying down motor pathways. Babies seem to have an amazing amount of patience for practicing the same move over and over. A well-fed, well-rested 5-month-old could probably spend an hour standing up and sitting down in her parent's lap – if her parent doesn't get bored first.

Parents will need to pay attention to what their infant can do, wants to do, and has energy to do. Their task is to provide a safe place for trying new skills, including watching out that the child doesn't get overtired and exasperated



by her inability to master a new skill. It is important that the child master the motor skills in the long run, of course, but she is also learning about learning during this crucial time. Parents want their child to experience learning as fun and rewarding, not as exhausting and discouraging.

To dig deep and expand out

Imagination, creativity, elaboration and flexibility

These aspects of approaches to learning involve taking skills and using them or understanding them in new ways. We often think of creativity and imagination as something young children excel at, but not necessarily infants. However, in the realm of learning, infants are as creative as any toddler or older child.

As children are mastering motor and language skills, they will naturally progress to expanding the different ways to move through the world and to use their vocabulary and grammar in new and creative ways.

To dig deep: Language skills

Many of the classic “errors” children make while learning to speak are excellent examples of creativity and elaboration, not to mention cognitive flexibility. Overextension errors usually occur when children have a limited

vocabulary to describe their very complex world. So, for example, a child might have a word for “dog” but no other animals. When she sees a cow, it would be very common for her to call it a “dog.” She will no doubt be corrected and will probably add the word “cow” to her vocabulary pretty quickly.

Usually these errors make a lot of sense to parents, and they usually even understand that the child is actually talking about the cow (for example, a child wouldn’t call a cow a “bed” just because she didn’t have the word for cow.)

Sometimes a child has to get even more creative when she encounters something she has no words for – like calling a garden hose a “water snake.” The more language a child masters, the more creative she will get; the very nature of language is to be endlessly creative. Fluent speakers of languages say and write sentences they have never heard or read all the time. Later in childhood, parents may have to encourage their children to dig deep into difficult material like subtraction or chemistry; in language development, digging deep happens organically and naturally – and out in public where we can see and enjoy it.

To dig deep: Motor skills

Almost all of motor skill learning is

an exercise in digging deep. Learning to reach begins with unconscious reflexes, like the [grasping reflex](#) and the asymmetric tonic neck or [fencing reflex](#) (where babies automatically stretch out an arm when they are on their back with their head turned to the side).

The reflexes lay down early motor tracks which are elaborated (by digging in) and become more conscious reaches and points. A baby will deliberately reach her arm out and relax it hundreds of times with no goal in mind just because it feels good, but it is practice for deliberately controlling the arm later.

As she learns to focus her attention and interacts with adults, she learns to use those early motor tracks to point and then to reach. She then learns to elaborate on earlier unconscious hand movements and grasp the things that come close to her hands when she reaches. The same is true in walking; infants begin laying down motor pathways with the [stepping reflex](#) and move on to deliberately standing, deliberately shifting weight from one foot to the other, deliberately walking.

Each next step in learning a motor skill is an elaboration on the one before and requires many hundreds of repetitions from slightly different positions to become skilled.

You might think that there would be little creativity involved in learning to walk.



However, it turns out that there are many different ways to learn to walk. Many infants begin crawling and then cruise holding on to furniture, finally walking independently. Some never crawl and just scoot while sitting up and then do a little sideways-hitch crawl before walking. Some infants (rarely, but some) never crawl or cruise but go straight from sitting to walking. And there are many different little combinations and variations of the progression from rolling over to running.

Each infant is different. Some will observe more and do less. Others will mimic and babble more. Some will be easily frustrated. Others will be happy with incoherent babbling. They will all be speaking relatively well in three years.

Infancy is a chance to learn how the child approaches learning. Will she need time to try things and perfect skills on her own before she tries in public? Does she happily complete lots and lots of trials as she masters skills? Or does she get frustrated quickly? Is she easily distracted by other people?

Your role as a parent educator

You will need to help parents create emotionally and physically safe places for children to learn new skills and explore new expertise. They need to be a safe base (as explained in the parent educator resources [Attachment](#) and [Nurturing Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers](#)), and

being in contact with them should allow the child to be free to learn. If being near a parent is stressful or produces anxiety, it's a problem for learning. No one learns well when stressed or anxious.

Point out things parents do that make their child happy and engaged. Those things can include whether the space is a safe space for rolling/crawling/walking and large enough for practice, how they hold or touch the child, their tone of voice, how well they pay attention to the child and how skillful they are at providing just the right amount of help.

Help parents recognize language, social, cognitive, and motor milestones and anticipate what skills their child will be learning next.

Remind parents that they need to interact with their child at her level and not be embarrassed by using parentese or talking about “babyish” things. Language develops when we engage with the baby, and it is easier to get the baby engaged in things that are interesting to her.

Finally, help parents remember the big picture – for the first three years while picking up language and motor skills, their child is learning about learning. The parents' goal should be to make learning rewarding and enjoyable. The baby will learn her skills no matter what, but she could also learn side lessons like “Mom

will make fun of me if I don't do it right the first time” or “Practicing skills is horribly frustrating” or “If I don't learn fast, Dad gets mad” or even, “Learning is stressful (or boring).”

In the long term, the way their child approaches learning contributes to academic achievement. The Early Head Start National Resource Center offers a three-part description of this on its [school readiness homepage](#).

Learning to walk and talk is incredibly fun and rewarding, and all parents have to do is pay attention, provide a little help here and there, and enjoy it, too!



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SAMPLE

Parenting Behaviors



Parents as Teachers®

- > Parenting Behaviors
- > Parenting Makes a Difference (PH)
- > Nurturing Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers
- > Feeling Safe While Exploring and Taking 'Good' Risks (PH)
- > Getting to Know Babies Through Infant Massage
- > Getting to Know Your Baby's Cues Through Infant Massage (PH)
- > Your Nurturing Touch: Practicing Infant Massage (PH)
- > Designing and Guiding as Your Baby Grows
- > Space and Structure for Your Little Explorer (PH)
- > Toy Safety Tips (PH)
- > Developing Healthy Relationships With TV and Technology
- > Babies and TV: A Healthy Start on Screen Time (PH)
- > Toddlers Need a TV Guide – YOU! (PH)
- > Responding to Babies and Young Children
- > Noticing and Responding to Cues (PH)
- > Choosing Age-Appropriate Toys for Babies (PH)
- > Choosing Age-Appropriate Toys for Toddlers (PH)
- > Communicating Before Birth and Beyond
- > Communicating With Babies: More Than Words Can Say (PH)
- > Crying
- > Your Baby Is Telling You Something (PH)
- > When the Crying Won't Stop (PH)
- > Toddlers and Crying (PH)
- > Baby Signs
- > Communicating With Your Child Through Signs (PH)
- > Helping Parents Share Music With Their Child
- > Making Music With Your Baby (PH)
- > Supporting Learning in the Early Years
- > What You Bring to Your Baby's Learning (PH)
- > Making the Most of Toys
- > Face Pattern (PH)
- > Puzzle Play (PH)
- > Exploring Music: Ways to Have Fun With Your Child (PH)





How Much Sleep Does Your Toddler Need?

There is no “one size fits all” tool for how much sleep your toddler needs. It depends on how much she runs around during the day, her temperament, and her body’s needs. If she is growing or learning a lot, she may need more sleep for a few days.

Your child is getting better at dealing with disruptions to her sleep routines (like a missed nap or an extra-late night). But if those things happen a lot, she may not get enough sleep for healthy development.

In fact, children who miss just one nap feel more anxiety, show less happiness, and get frustrated more easily.

As your child gets older, you may have more trouble getting her to bed on time.

Start with routines that help her wind down from the day’s activities. These should be calm and simple – reading a story, taking a bath, or snuggling with a blanket.

Age	In 24 hours, your toddler should sleep about ...	Date	Your observations
1 year	11 to 14 hours, with two naps. As your toddler becomes more active you may decide to transition to one nap per day. At this age, most children still benefit from morning and afternoon naps of 1 or 2 hours each.		
18 months to 2 years	11 to 14 hours. Your toddler may be moving toward one afternoon nap of one to two hours. She should still get 11 to 12 hours of sleep at night. In the mornings, you may want to plan for some downtime in case your child is tired during what used to be naptime.		
2 years	11 to 14 hours. Your toddler will probably sleep 11 to 12 hours at night, with a one- to two-hour nap each afternoon. Life is more interesting as she develops new motor, cognitive, and social skills. You may experience some struggles about going to bed. Be consistent and patient with her.		
3 years	10 to 13 hours. Your toddler’s nighttime sleep will be about 10 to 11 hours. She will probably take a one- or two-hour nap in the afternoon. Her nighttime sleep can be affected by an exciting day, sickness, changes in normal routines, and developmental milestones. Thanks to her active imagination, she may start to have nightmares.		



REFLECTION

Think about your toddler's changing sleep needs.

How has your child's nap schedule changed?

Do you have daily nap and bedtime routines?

Has she had bad dreams?

Is she generally sleeping through the night? What's the best way to get her back to sleep if she wakes up?

Does she show any separation anxiety, such as not wanting to sleep in her own bed?

What objects (blankets or stuffed animals) and routines does your child find most relaxing before going to sleep?



Stress and Resilience

The human body reacts quickly when we think there is danger. If we see a toddler heading toward a busy street, we don't stop to think through all the possible actions, we move – fast, sometimes faster than we thought possible. This is a stress response.

That extra speed is possible because our bodies know when to release a series of chemicals that allow our heart to beat stronger and faster and our lungs to take in more air to help our muscles work harder. We need that burst of energy to make sure we can move quickly. On a day-to-day basis, our bodies may experience stress on a much less noticeable scale.

Stress can range from mild to severe. We call the milder form of stress **eustress** and the more severe forms **distress** and **toxic stress**. Eustress is the healthy version of stress – it helps us wake up in the morning and helps us get dinner ready in the evening. Eustress pushes us to do the best we can.

But if stressful events start piling up faster than we can cope with them, our

ability to be effective begins to decrease and our body goes into distress. Stress can be sudden, as in the example of seeing a toddler heading for a busy street; but when day-to-day stress isn't relieved it becomes **chronic stress**. Chronic stress becomes unhealthy when someone begins to think of it as normal and starts to lose hope of ever feeling differently. When our bodies' stress systems are activated for a long time,

Parent handouts

[Coping With Stress](#)

[Relaxation Breathing and Other Ways to Release Stress](#)

[When You're Feeling Lonely](#)

[How Am I Feeling?](#)

Activity pages

[Releasing Tension](#)

[Roll Away Your Worries](#)

[So You've Told Everyone](#)

Related topics

[Attachment](#)

[Health](#)

[Introduction, Plans, and Tools](#)

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Child Development



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toxic stress can result. This is a serious state that, if left unaddressed, can change the brain's architecture.

The cortisol and other chemicals released by our body during a stressful event play a large role in taking eustress over to distress. It takes time for our body to reabsorb those chemicals, and if we experience a stressful event on top of the first one then it takes even more time to get back to normal. If the stress is with us day in and day out, our bodies never have a chance to get back to eustress.

Common causes of stress

Even good things can cause stress. Think about the birth of a child or adding a new significant partner in your life. Both of those things require an adjustment in the way we think and act. Distress occurs when there are more stress-producing events in our life than we can manage at any one time.

Some common stressful events could be:

- > Birth of a child
- > Wedding or adding a significant partner
- > Moving
- > Financial problems
- > Changes in employment

- > Starting or graduating from school
- > Death or loss of a close friend or family member
- > Time management
- > Personal and family expectations

Everyone reacts differently to events depending on their past experience and their resiliency. A pile of bills could be mild stress for someone who knows they need to be paid but is confident the money is available to pay them, but in a family where there are more bills than money, that same pile will cause distress. It is our **perception** of the severity of the problem that determines how we will react. Some people become very distressed because they imagine the worst possible outcome even when others tell them not to worry.

Effects on parents

When we feel eustress we can actually feel energized and ready to go. Think of stress as a stimulus: A little bit is helpful, but too much can drain our energy and the ability to cope. When stress moves into distress some of the symptoms may include:

- > Headache
- > Stomachache

- > Muscle aches
- > Not sleeping well
- > Irritability, anxiety, or tension
- > Rapid heartbeat or high blood pressure

As stress continues into chronic stress it takes an even worse toll on the human body. Irritability turns to violence, high blood pressure turns to heart attacks, and the depleted immune system can no longer protect us from other diseases.

When parents are overwhelmed by stressful events, it becomes more and more challenging for them to care for themselves or others. Irritability can evolve into a parent yelling or shouting at a child – or to hit. Frustration could lead the parent of a crying baby to shake her. Parents who are withdrawn or depressed could forget to make meals or may not have the energy to enforce consistent limits.

In a family where one parent is experiencing overwhelming stress, the effect frequently spills over into all family members. When working with families it is important to look at all family members, not just the parent usually seen at the personal visit.

.....
"Without stress, there would be no life." – Hans Selye, physician and stress researcher



Effects on children

Parents living in chronic stress are at high risk for events that could lead to child abuse or neglect. When a parent is overstressed it is more difficult to provide the calm, caring atmosphere a child needs to grow and develop. Attachment is more difficult for a parent who is irritable and not feeling well. And when children don't feel a safe, positive attachment, they in turn feel stress.

As a child's brain grows, too much stress can become toxic. It can temporarily or even permanently affect

the part of the brain required for making attachments. Further, children raised in families with toxic stress may develop concerning behaviors like temper tantrums, biting, hitting, and, occasionally, withdrawal or failure to thrive.

When parents complain or talk about challenging behaviors of their children, you as a parent educator should remember that those behaviors may be the child's reaction to the parents' stress. It is important to explore the family as a whole when looking for strategies to help the parents with their child.

Stress, discrimination, and birth outcomes

Researchers are exploring mothers' lifelong stressful experiences related to discrimination as one possible explanation for the persistent racial gap in U.S. birth outcomes. Both before and during pregnancy, members of stigmatized minority groups may experience stereotype threat. This is the worry that one will confirm a negative societal stereotype about one's group or be treated according to that stereotype. For more information, read [Pregnancy: A Period of Adjustment](#).

Helping parents focus on strengths and past successes reduces the negative effects of stereotype threat. The presence of cues implying fairness increases trust and can also reduce feelings of stereotype threat – even in settings with features known to trigger it. For instance, inside an agency and or work space, pictures or artifacts associated with racial minority groups should be visible. This sends clear signals that parent educators value and appreciate others unlike themselves. It also makes an explicit and implicit statement of a program's goal to provide high-quality services to everyone.

Your role as a parent educator

We can't make stressful situations go away, but we can help teach parents better ways to cope with the stressful events in their lives. For example, the handout [Relaxation Breathing and Other Ways to Release Stress](#) goes into detail on how to do relaxation breathing and offers ideas for adding other calming routines, including yoga, meditation, music, and massage. By helping families build resilience, they learn skills that they can then pass on to their children.

To help parents reflect on their current emotions and feelings, provide them with the handout [How Am I Feeling?](#) Remind parents that they can do simple things every day to help relieve stress. For example, research suggests that simply laughing “lowers blood pressure and cholesterol, strengthens the immune system, reduces physical tension, and relieves emotional stress” (Herrington, 2013, para. 1). Likewise, the less obvious act of coloring has a therapeutic benefit that combats stress. Coloring has a “calming effect on daily stress and, in some cases, trauma (Mental Health America of Eastern Missouri, 2015).

Ginsberg (2006) defined what he calls the seven C's of Resilience: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Contribution, Coping, and Control. When you empower families to



build these strengths, you give them skills to help cope with the stressful events in their lives.

Competence: Parents need to feel that they know how to handle situations they encounter. You help build competence in families when you observe positive parenting skills and point out your observations. Parents can help their child gain competency by giving her the freedom to try-try-try again until a task is mastered.

Confidence: Confidence builds on competence. It is the inner belief that says, “I can do that!” When you point out the strengths you observe, you are reinforcing the parent’s confidence. Parents help build their child’s confidence by building problem-solving skills and then allowing them freedom and safe opportunities to practice those skills.

Connection: Being connected to a larger community is critical for resilience. Connections provide a safety net when events become overwhelming and decrease the sense of loneliness and isolation that happen in chronic stress. Invite parents to group connections so they can meet other parents and listen as they describe places and people that help them find strength. Parents send children the message about the importance of connections when they take them to playgroups and involve them when family and friends gather together. Offer the

parent handout [When You’re Feeling Lonely](#) for ideas about how to connect.

Character: Having a deep sense of family values can help a parent make decisions when stressful events occur. Spend time listening to parents and talking with them about cultural and family values. Ask: “What kind of person do you want your child to become?” Sometimes you will need to work with families to help them express those values so they can consciously pass them on to their children.

Contribution: Even in the worst of situations, it is always possible to give back to others. That sense of being able to help can enhance a parent’s feelings of self-worth. It might be helpful to introduce the topic of contribution at a group connection and discuss ideas of activities that could be done at little or no cost. Donating items to a charity is one example. Like all children, low-income children outgrow clothing and toys. Point out to parents that they contribute back to the community when they donate items they no longer use.

Coping: There are two basic ways of positive coping: changing the problem or changing the reaction to the problem. The other type of coping, withdrawal or denial, can provide temporary relief but is not effective as a long-term positive coping strategy. Use the [Coping With Stress](#) parent handout to discuss what

style of coping works best for parents and then discuss additional strategies.

Control: Resilience means a person is confident in his ability to control a situation or his reaction to a situation. You can help parents develop control by respecting the decisions they make for their family. When a parent is upset about events that may be out of his control, talk to the parent about what he can control, as well as how to emotionally cope with what he can’t.

For more information

The Healthy Mind Platter

demonstrates that seven essential daily activities are essential for optimal mental well-being (Rock & Siegel, n.d.):

- > Focus Time
- > Play Time
- > Connecting Time
- > Physical Time
- > Time In
- > Down Time
- > Sleep Time

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REFLECTION

Take time to
think about your
stress level.

**How high is your own stress level?
As a parent? As a professional?**

**What do you notice in your body, your
mind, and your feelings as you leave
the office?**

**If you answer “yes” to any of
these, consider speaking with your
supervisor about it. It is normal
for parent educators to absorb
some of their families’ stress, even
subconsciously.**

1. At the end of the work week, is your stress level closer to 10 than 1?
2. Do you notice that some days are more difficult or some easier? Can you detect a pattern?
3. Do certain families or certain types of families stress you?
4. Do you dream about your families and wake up tired?

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Visit Planning Process Hub



Parents as Teachers®

Planning each personal visit involves gathering information from many different sources to help with both the “what” (three areas of emphasis) and the “how” (parent educator’s three roles) as explained in [*The Parent Educator’s Role in the Personal Visit*](#).

Starting with the [*Foundational Personal Visit Plans*](#)

The materials mentioned in the plans can be supplemented with:

- > [*Foundational Personal Visit 1*](#)
 - > Your program’s participation agreement
 - > [*Recruitment and Enrollment Record**](#)
- > All visits after [*Foundational Personal Visit 2*](#)
 - > Obtain information and resources needed to supplement the family well-being sections
 - > [*Personal Visit Preparation Checklist**](#)
- > All visits starting with [*Foundational Personal Visit 4*](#)
 - > Choose an [*Activity Page*](#)
 - > [*Activity Page Tracking Tool**](#)
(Foundational 2 Curriculum: 3 Years Through Kindergarten only)
- > [*Foundational Visit Plans 4, 6 and 8*](#)
 - > Choose a [*Child Development*](#) resource and parent handout based on the developmental age of the child to use in completing the Parent-Child Interaction section of these plans.

Starting with the [*Personal Visit Planning Guide**](#)

In addition to the materials mentioned on the guide, these will be helpful in the planning process:

- > [*Personal Visit Preparation Checklist**](#)
- > [*Developmental Topics Chart*](#) and [*Developmental Topics Tracking Tool**](#)
- > [*Milestones**](#) (to be filled out after every visit)
- > [*Goal Tracking Sheet**](#)
- > Toolkit
- > [*Personal Visit Record**](#)
- > [*Activity Page Tracking Tool**](#)
(Foundational 2 Curriculum: 3 Years Through Kindergarten only)

At times during the course of routine service delivery, the planning process will include:

- > [*Health Record**](#)
- > [*Screening Summary**](#)
- > [*Permission to Exchange Information**](#)

- > [*Parenting Reflection**](#)
- > [*Exit Record**](#)
- > [*Connections and Recommendations Tracking Tool**](#)

For some families, you may also consider using:

- > [*Activity Page Template*](#)
- > [*Problem Solving*](#)
- > [*DOVE: Structured Intimate Partner Violence Home Visit Intervention*](#)
- > [*Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale*](#)
- > [*Protective Factors Survey*](#)
- > [*FINE Smile*](#)
- > [*Circles of Support*](#)
- > [*Visualizing*](#)

*These forms and the guidance for using them are offered within the [**ebiz portal**](#).