

What Parents Should Know...

About the Important Role They Play in Their Child's Early Development

Children are born ready to learn and have many skills to learn over many years. They depend on parents, family members, and other caregivers as their first teachers to develop the right skills to become independent and lead healthy and successful lives. How the brain grows is strongly affected by the child's experiences with other people and the world.

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/early-brain-development.html>

Parents Create the Environment That Nurtures Child Development



Research shows us that babies learn from the moment they are born. Children learn to move, talk, communicate, play, and behave because of what they hear, see, and experience in their environment. Babies learn that their behavior can create a desired result; a cry can get them fed, “babble” will be rewarded with attention and conversation from someone near them.

When a child has barriers to learning, (such as vision or hearing impairments, delays or impairments that interfere with motor skills or learning, disabilities or special health needs that impact social/emotional or communication skill development), he or she may need more time and supports to safely explore their environment. Some experiences may need to be repeated, or extra explanations or descriptions may be needed for him or her to learn what other children learn simply by watching and imitating. Professionals can assist with direct teaching and will provide families with instruction and suggestions on how to incorporate therapeutic technique into everyday life.

The first year, parents can help their baby's development by:

As a child's first and most important teacher, there are many things that parents and family members can do to help children learn and develop.

- Act excited and smile when your baby makes sounds, copying your baby's sounds and adding more.
- Talk, sing and read to baby throughout the day when baby is awake and alert.
- Spend time holding and cuddling your baby.
- Play games such as peek-a-boo, hide and seek, and teach songs that require hand movements such as Itsy Bitsy Spider.
- Give baby age appropriate toys to encourage them to use their hands.
- Have tummy time and floor time so baby can move and explore.
- Take time for self care so you are at your best.



During years 2 and 3....

What a wonderful age of moving, exploring and independence! Toddlers may show defiant behavior, recognize themselves in pictures or mirrors, and imitate the behavior of others. They will form simple phrases and sentences, follow simple instructions and directions, and express a wide range of emotions.

Parents can help their toddler's development by:

- Read to your toddler daily.
- Ask him/her to find and name objects, colors, body parts, animals, etc.
- Play matching and sorting games.
- Have fun with coloring, painting, Play-Doh, and blocks.
- Introduce puzzles and simple songs like Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.
- Encourage him/her to explore and try new things.
- Help to develop your toddler's language by talking with them and adding to words they start. For example, if your toddler says "baba", you can respond, "Yes, you are right—that is a bottle." Encourage words!
- Narrate (explain) day to day routines and activities, from diaper changes to getting dressed.
- Take trips, large or small, and point out and name new things.
- Encourage pretend play.
- Have play dates with other children.
- Encourage your child's growing independence by letting him help with dressing and feeding himself and helping with 'chores'.
- Respond to wanted behaviors more than you punish unwanted behaviors (use only very brief time outs). Always tell or show your child what she should do instead.
- Be clear and consistent when disciplining your child. Explain and show the behavior that you expect from her. Whenever you tell her no, follow up with what she should be doing instead.

For more ideas and activities, go to: <https://www.learning4kids.net/category/2-3years/>

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During years 3-5

You now have a preschooler! Your preschooler may love their bike, tricycle, or Strider. Your child will have a wonderful imagination! They may love the swing set, begin potty training, and have strong emotions and fears. They are learning to take turns and play with others. Their fine motor skills are developing, and they may ask many, many questions, but also show a lot of affection!

Parents can help their preschooler's development by:

- Continue to read to your child. Nurture her love for books by taking her to the library or bookstore.
- Let your child help with simple chores.
- Continue play groups to help learn sharing, turn taking, and playing with others.
- Help your child develop good language skills by speaking to him in complete sentences and using "grown up" words. Help him to use the correct words and phrases.
- Help with identifying emotions, learning names of emotions and how to calm themselves and solve problems when upset.
- Give your child simple choices (for example, deciding what to wear, what to play, and what to eat for snack. Two choices are plenty, you don't want to overwhelm them).
- Encourage your preschooler to play outdoors. Playgrounds are great for gross motor play!
- Open them up to more experiences by taking them to different places e.g. wildlife park, museum, playgroup, aquarium, or library. Be creative!
- Be creative in setting up play activities e.g. painting, music, arts, and crafts.
- Show interest in their questions and take the time to reply.



What if I'm concerned about my child's development?

Children develop at many different rates, and the 'normal' range can be very broad. What do you do if you have a concern about your child's development?

- Share with your child's **primary care provider** your concerns and ask for a developmental screening or referral to have one completed.
- The **South Dakota Birth to Three Early Intervention Program** serves children from birth to 36 months with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. If you have questions, or would like to schedule a screening, contact the **South Dakota Department of Education, South Dakota Birth to Three**, 800 Governors Drive, Pierre, SD 57501. (605) 773-3678 or 800-305-3064.
- Contact your local school district
- Contact **South Dakota Parent Connection**: www.sdparent.org

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Resources for Parents:

The goal of the **Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL)** is to promote the adoption and sustained use of evidence-based early literacy learning practices. <http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/>

Bright Start empowers first-time moms to maintain healthy pregnancies and raise healthy, happy babies. <https://chssd.org/brightstart>

DSS has a mission to strengthen and support individuals and families. <https://dss.sd.gov/>

South Dakota Head Start Association is a powerful advocate for children and families. <http://www.sdheadstart.org/home.aspx>

PBS Kids for parents is filled with information and activities to do with your child. You can also sign up for their newsletter. <https://www.pbs.org/parents/preschool-learning-at-home>

South Dakota Statewide Family Engagement Center supports families to help children birth to five years old reach their full potential. <https://sdsfec.org/birthto5/>

Zero to Three supports parents in developing their own ways to promote their children's growth and development. <https://www.zerotothree.org/parenting>

South Dakota Parent Connection connects families caring for children/youth (ages birth to 26) with the full range of disabilities or special health care needs to information, training, and resources in an environment of support, hope and respect. www.sdparent.org

Resources to measure child development:

Easter Seals, Make the First Five Count, has a video, activity books and screening tool you can access online. <https://www.easterseals.com/mtffc/asq/>

CDC's Developmental Milestones: Learn the Signs. Act Early

Learn the Signs. Act Early offers information on tracking your child's developmental milestones, birth through age 5. This link also offers videos for parents, positive parenting tips, child development articles, and more. You can also download and print or order materials such as, Amazing Me, and Milestone Moments booklet. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>
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