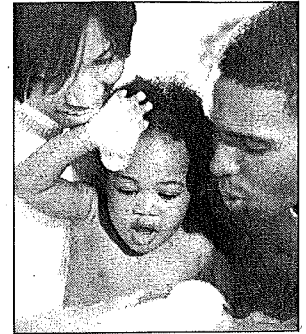



Everyday Ways to Support Your Baby's and Toddler's Early Learning



Your baby is learning—about you, himself, and the world around him—from the moment he enters the world. The chart below gives you some ideas of the many ways you can support your child's early learning through your everyday activities.

What's Going On With Your Baby or Toddler	What You Can Do
<p>Language and Communication Babies express their needs and feelings through sounds and cries, body movements, and facial expressions. Your baby will begin using words sometime around 1 year. By the time she is 3, she will be speaking in short (3-5 word) sentences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch and listen to see how your baby communicates what she is thinking and feeling. • Repeat the sounds and words your child uses and have back-and-forth conversations. • Read, sing, and tell stories. These are fun ways to help your child understand the meaning of new words and ideas. • Talk about what you do together—as you play, do errands, or visit friends and family.
<p>Thinking Skills Your child is learning how the world works by playing and exploring. Through play, babies and toddlers learn about how things work and how to be good problem-solvers.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to explore toys in different ways—by touching, banging, stacking, shaking. • Turn everyday routines into playful learning moments. For example bath time is a chance to learn about ideas like <i>sinking/floating</i> and <i>wet/dry</i>. • Follow your child's interests. Children learn best through activities that excite them. • Ask your child questions that get him thinking as he nears age 3. For example, when reading a book together, ask <i>Why do you think the girl is laughing?</i>
<p>Self-Control Over the first 3 years, your child is beginning to develop self-control—the ability to manage his feelings and actions in acceptable ways. He is also learning to wait, share, and work out problems with his friends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use words to help your child understand his feelings. <i>You are really mad because we have to leave the park.</i> • Give choices to older toddlers. <i>Would you like to read books before or after we brush teeth?</i> • Stay calm when your child is upset. This helps him feel safe and get back in control.
<p>Self-Confidence Your child is learning that she is a very special person; that she is loved, smart, fun, and capable. When children feel good about themselves, they are more confident and willing to take on new challenges.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment on what your child does well. <i>You found the button that makes the bear pop up!</i> • Help your child be a good problem-solver. Give her the support she needs to be successful without completely solving the problem for her. • Give your child the chance to do things for herself like pouring milk from a small plastic pitcher. • Encourage your child to keep trying. <i>You are working so hard to get the ball in the basket. Sometimes it takes lots of tries!</i>

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How Child Care Providers Can Support Early Learning

These strategies are designed especially for family, friends, and neighbors who provide child care and want to support the early learning of the babies and toddlers in their lives.

Babies are born ready to learn. They are naturally curious beings who are motivated to make sense of the world around them. The brain is the only part of the body not fully formed at birth. From birth to 3 years of age, trillions of connections between brain cells are being made. *A child's relationships and experiences during the early years greatly influence how her brain grows.* Adults often wonder how they can get their baby or toddler off to a good start so that he is ready for kindergarten. Remember, young children learn best through *everyday experiences with the people they love and trust and when the learning is fun.* Children develop at their own pace and in their own way. You can help babies and toddlers learn and grow by getting to know each child in your care and engaging in activities that match their individual skills, needs, and interests.

Four Key Skill Areas

Language & Literacy Skills

Learning to communicate, first through gestures and babbles and then through words, helps children connect to the people and world around them. The development of language skills is the foundation for becoming literate. Reading to children and letting them play with books helps to build their interest in books. Talking, reading aloud, and singing all nurture children's language skills and help them experience stories through listening.

Thinking Skills

Children are born with a drive to understand how the world works. They

start by figuring out connections such as, "I cry, Daddy comes to get me." As they grow, these connections become more complex; for example, "If the ball disappears under the couch, I can use this stick to get it back." Children learn how the world works when they are given the chance to explore—to shake, toss, touch, listen, stack, knock down, bounce, and so forth. When children are exploring and having fun, they are learning.

Self-Control

The ability to express and manage emotions in appropriate ways is called self-control. Self-control is also the ability to stop oneself from doing something that is not allowed. Very young children have little self-control, but you can help babies and toddlers work on skills like cooperating,

coping with frustration, sharing, and resolving conflicts, which all lead to the development of self-control.

Self-Confidence

When children feel good about themselves and their abilities, they are more willing to take on new challenges—a key ingredient for school success. Self-confidence is important for getting along with others and developing relationships with peers, which are key factors in enjoying and succeeding in school.

The following table provides suggestions for supporting these four key skill areas.

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What You Can Do

BIRTH TO 12 MONTHS	12 TO 24 MONTHS	24 TO 36 MONTHS
<p>Language and Literacy Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk together. Copy babies' sounds, and encourage babies to imitate you. Between 6 and 12 months, babies may begin putting sounds together, like "dada" and "baba." Make these sounds meaningful by repeating and expanding them: "You want more milk!" • Share books. It's never too early to start sharing books with babies. Let them explore books in whatever way they like. Offer chunky board, cloth, or soft bath books for chewing and gumming. Babies really enjoy lift-and-flap books as well. Follow the baby's lead when it comes to reading. This may sometimes mean staying on the same page the whole time or "reading" the book upside down! 	<p>Language and Literacy Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk together. Point out and name the things you see. Ask what each item is, then wait a few seconds before you offer the answer. This gives children a chance to respond and show you what they know. Research shows that the more adults talk with children, the bigger the children's vocabularies. • Share books together. Let the child hold the book. Point to the pictures as you read together. Ask him to point to the baby, house, or dog. You can start to read stories that introduce ideas such as <i>up/down</i>, <i>big/little</i>, <i>colors</i>, and <i>numbers</i>. Most children are also just beginning to learn to sing—try the book version of "Wheels on the Bus." 	<p>Language and Literacy Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk together. Talk about everything! The more you talk, the more words children will learn. Tell each other stories. Singing with children also teaches new words and ideas. Remember, at this age, toddlers can understand more than they can say. • Share books together. Point to pictures in books and ask toddlers what they think is happening. Make connections between books and "real life": "Look, there's a school bus just like the one in our story today." Let toddlers choose their own books—they enjoy picking their favorites.
<p>Thinking Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children to explore objects and toys in different ways. Touching, banging, shaking, and rolling help babies learn about how things work. Talk with babies about what they are doing: "You got the truck to move by pulling the string!" • Make everyday activities "teachable moments." For example, diapering can be a time for talking about body parts; this helps babies develop body awareness and learn new words. You can also sing to babies, which promotes bonding and builds language skills. 	<p>Thinking Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the children's lead. Toddlers learn many new concepts through everyday activities. If a child loves to be active, she will learn about <i>fast</i> and <i>slow</i>, <i>up</i> and <i>down</i>, and <i>over</i> and <i>under</i> as she plays on the playground. If she prefers to explore with her hands, she will learn the same ideas by playing with toys such as blocks. • One more time! Toddlers like to repeat actions over and over again. This strengthens the connections in the brain that help children learn new skills. Provide interesting and challenging activities (e.g., blocks, puzzles, water, and sand) that encourage children to problem solve. 	<p>Thinking Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage imaginative play. Let toddlers take the lead in play time. This helps them develop their own ideas. You can ask, "Who should I pretend to be? What happens next?" Help children learn to be logical thinkers by building on the stories they're creating: "You said the baby doll is crying. Why is she sad?" • Make math part of your everyday routines. Count as you climb the stairs. Notice patterns around you, like the stripes on a child's shirt. See if children would like to sort toys such as little cars and big cars into piles.
<p>Self-Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help babies learn to soothe themselves. The calmer babies feel, the more in control they will be. Babies have different ways of calming down. Some need lots of rocking or hugging; others prefer to be swaddled or put down for a minute. <i>You teach the babies in your care to calm themselves by staying calm yourself when they lose control.</i> This helps them feel safe. • Teach acceptable behaviors. Tell and show babies what they can do, as well as what they can't. If a baby is banging a toy on another child, stop her and immediately show her how she can bang the toy on the floor instead. 	<p>Self-Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to teach children limits. Setting consistent limits makes children feel safe because the limits help them know what to expect. A child who has her crayons taken away when she writes on the wall learns that she either writes on paper or she can't use crayons. • Label and validate children's feelings. Letting children know that their feelings are understood helps them calm down and regain control. This doesn't mean giving in to their demand: "I know you are mad that we had to come inside, but hitting me is not okay. You can hit this pillow instead." Giving children choices also helps them feel in control—and helps them calm down. 	<p>Self-Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give choices. Present a toddler with two acceptable options and let him choose: "Would you like to have a snack first or clean up first?" If they really don't have a choice, don't offer one. Instead of, "Are you ready for a nap?" say, "It's nap time. Which book do you want to read before lights out?" • Play turn-taking games. Activities like taking turns hitting a ball off a tee, making music as a group, or passing a toy around a circle all help children "practice" taking turns. This is a crucial skill for building strong friendships.
<p>Self-Confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish routines with children. Most children feel safe, confident, and in control of their world when events are predictable—when they happen in approximately the same way at the same time each day. Routines are a way to help children make sense of the world. • Do it again and again and again. Children need lots of practice doing things over and over again to succeed at a new skill. Think of the pride a baby feels when he can finally grasp the rattle and put it in his mouth by himself. 	<p>Self-Confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let children be problem solvers. See yourself as a coach. Give toddlers the support they need to solve a problem, but don't solve it for them every time. For instance, line up their jackets so it is easy to slip them on, rather than you putting them on each time. Mastering these challenges makes toddlers feel confident in their ability to solve new problems and learn new things. • Provide challenges. Watch to see what skills each child has learned and then help him take the next step. If a child can easily build towers with blocks, suggest that the blocks can also be a house for stuffed animals. This helps toddlers learn about pretend play. 	<p>Self-Confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give children responsibilities. Children feel proud when they can show you how they lay out napkins for a snack or water plants. Be specific about what you want them to do: "Please pick up your blocks," instead of "Please clean up." • Encourage children to ask for help. Let children know that you see when they are struggling, and ask what help they want: "Getting shoes on can be so hard! Sometimes opening up the laces can make it easier. Can I help you loosen them?" Let children see that you need help sometimes too.