

# BE INVOLVED

There is no one quality or skill that children need to do well in school, but a combination of factors contributes to school success. These include physical well-being, social and emotional maturity, language skills, an ability to solve problems and think creatively, and general knowledge about the world.

**As a parent, you are your child’s first teacher. Up to 85% of brain development occurs between birth and age five and many dispositions towards learning and skills in social relationships are formed during those important early years.**

Parents and educators are encouraged to engage in eight key practices that support growth and learning. These are:



The potential payoffs are enormous. If children are regularly exposed to these practices they are more likely to be **healthy, safe, confident, creative, kind, active, curious and problem solvers.**

The **Be Involved Campaign** is an outgrowth of the Collaboration’s Dialogues Project in which educators of children birth through kindergarten met to discuss the characteristics of successful young learners and the environments and activities to foster those characteristics. Children who have had the benefit of exposure to the practices identified in **Be Involved** are much more likely to succeed in school and their adult lives than children who have not.

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## ❖❖❖ READ ❖❖❖

### Reading Begins at Home

Reading is one of life's most pleasurable experiences. Many people believe that young children learn to read in kindergarten or first grade. But research tells us that young children learn about language, communication, speaking and writing long before age five or six. The very first lessons in reading do not happen in school, they begin at home.

Reading aloud to your infant, toddler and young child is very important.

Reading aloud.....

- stimulates your child's imagination
- develops your child's interest in reading and in books
- improves your child's listening skills
- builds vocabulary
- helps your child to understand stories and book language
- creates a bond between you and your child
- provides your child with a positive role model

### Some Simple Suggestions

- Start early reading to your child. Even infants will enjoy snuggling on your lap, looking at the pictures and listening to your voice.
- Set aside a time to read aloud to your child every day! Actually several times a day is best.
- Read for pleasure – make it fun. Use a variety of voices to represent the various characters in the story. If the story is silly use a silly voice, if it is an exciting story use your voice to build excitement.
- Read a few pages, stop and ask your child to make a prediction about what will happen next.
- Encourage your child to create his/her own ending to a story.
- Be sure to talk about the story after you've completed the reading. Thoughts, hopes, fears and discoveries can be stimulated by a book.
- Select a variety of types of books to read to your child. Ask your local librarian to assist you in choosing different types of books which are age appropriate. There are traditional tales and nursery rhymes, books that play with language (ie. Dr. Seuss books), stories that take you to far away places and different cultures, books that are repetitious and rhythmic, and books about real things such as fish, trees, apples, fire engines, caves, etc. By sharing different kinds of books with children, they can enjoy different kinds of reading experiences and build your child's vocabulary.
- Look together at the cover of the book. Point out the title, author and illustrator of the book. Talk about what an author does and what an illustrator does.
- Look at the pictures in the book. Retell the story together using the pictures.

- Read it again and again and again!
- Always have books available for your child to look at. Board books for infants and toddlers on a low shelf or in a basket is a good start. As children get older keep adding to their library. There should be books in the child's bedroom as well as in the living area of the home. In your child's book collection include: ABC and counting books, wordless picture books, books with rhythm and rhyme, traditional stories, poetry and nursery rhymes, information books (factual books about specific topics) and concept books (ie. colors, shapes, opposites).
- Lead by example. Make sure that your child sees you reading a variety of things – books, signs, charts, recipes, mail, magazines and the names of stores. You will be a model for your child that reading is pleasurable and important and something you value.
- Sometimes when reading a book with your child point out letters and the sounds they make, such as when reading a book about dinosaurs. Point to the letter “d”, name that letter for your child, and make the sound of “d” together.
- Alphabet puzzles and alphabet blocks are easy ways to expose your child to letters. As you play with these items with your child make some of the letter sounds together. Phonemic awareness is the ability to make the sound of the letters and is an important precursor to reading.

### **How can something as simple as reading to a child be so effective?**

We read to children for all the same reasons we talk with children: to reassure, to entertain, to bond, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, and to inspire.

In reading aloud, you also:

- build a desire to read,
- stir the imagination,
- expand a child's world,
- build vocabulary and
- provide a reading role model.

### **RESOURCES**

Cullinan, Bernice E., Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read. Scholastic Inc. 1992.

Schickedanz, Judith A., Much More Than the ABC's, The Early Stages of Reading and Writing. NAEYC, 1999.

Trelease, Jim, Hey! Listen to This: Stories to Read Aloud. Penguin Books Ltd. 1992.

Trelease, Jim, The Read-Aloud Handbook. Penguin Books Ltd. 2006.

*Helping Your Child Become a Reader* [www.2ed.gov/parents/read/resources](http://www.2ed.gov/parents/read/resources)

Reading is Fundamental [www.rif.org](http://www.rif.org)

## ❖❖❖ PLAY ❖❖❖

**Play is the thing.**

**For a child's . . .**

**body to spring - into action,**

**heart to sing- its own song,**

**soul to fling - out to others,**

**mind to ring- with insights...**

**Play is the thing. Let's Play along. - J. Minter**

### **The Defining Characteristics of Play**

- Play is the enjoyment of the Moment – Self-directed pleasure sustains the activity.
- Play means there is active engagement – A child is fully absorbed in a self-chosen activity.
- Play is prompted by internal motivation – A child has an internal, instinctive drive to play.
- Play is universal – Cultural and socio-economic differences in early childhood are minimal since young children are less socialized and influenced by cultural traditions. The drive to play is universal in young children.

### **Stages of Social play**

- Solitary play – A child plays alone.
- Parallel play – A child plays alongside, but not with another child.
- Associative play – Children engage in group play with an exchange of materials and conversation.
- Cooperative play - Children are involved in highly organized play with others involving roles and negotiations to plan and carry out the play.

### **Play's Profound Purpose**

Children at play are highly motivated, developing physical, social, emotional and cognitive skills at the same time as they are expressing ideas and creativity, and learning concepts.

Play is practice:

Thinking, choosing, inventing, exploring.

Planning, negotiating, problem-solving, rehearsing.

Play is constructing knowledge.

Active participation in play leads to opportunities for mastery and control and feelings of competence.

Engagement with others helps develop empathy and healthy peer relations through fostering language and communication skills.

Play is fantasy/make-believe. The imagination provides a safe place where children can escape the limits of reality, explore intense feelings, express emotions, experiment with power, and master pretend

problems. Pretending gives children freedom to recreate and modify reality and reach new levels of comprehension.

Play fosters curiosity and wonder. The open, flexible and dynamic nature of play allows children to pursue their own interests and dreams. Wonder is nurtured by meaningful inquiry and novel work. The mind is freed by the discipline of wonder.

Play promotes practical intelligence and the love of learning. Through play, children reach understanding by testing their own hypotheses while at the same time developing initiative and self-confidence.

“Success in a rapidly changing world depends on being able to think creatively and quickly.” “To be able to learn for ourselves and to like learning new things, we need to be skilled players.”

(Quotes from Elizabeth Jones, “Playing to Get Smart” Master Players: Learning from Children at Play, 1997.)

Play is discovery learning, instead of rote learning.

“Play is the most familiar and comfortable tool for engaging the world, with adults as essential scaffolds.”

(Klein, Wirth, Linas. “Play- Children’s Context for Development” Young Children, May 2003.)

### **Tips for Grown-Ups: What do we do?**

1. First and foremost, adults should have an **awareness of the importance of play** in children’s lives. Play is an essential element of childhood.

2. Adults should **support and enhance play in children’s daily lives**. Provide time, space and open-ended materials for children’s play.

3. Strive to provide children with a full and varied background of **real experiences** with family members, friends and in the widening community. Visit a relative. Learn from neighbors and community business people. Ride the bus or train. Visit a new place.

4. **Allow enough time** for children to develop and evolve their play to its fullest enjoyment and learning potential with minimal disruption. It takes more than 10 -15 minutes. Be flexible so you can to allow play to run its natural course.

5. **Trust the child**. Respect that the personal meaning for the child is as valid as adult theories of developmental benefits. Recollections of joyous moments of free play during childhood provide comfort and “happy memories” that are valuable to counteract stress throughout life.

(David Elkind, “The Lasting Value of True Play”, The Hurried Child. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1981.)

6. **Focus on the process**. Products are incidental in an activity where players agree upon rules and plans, create shared meaning, change direction and roles, engage willingly in problem-solving and cooperation.

7. Adults can observe and extend children’s understanding by **sensitive guidance** (asking open-ended questions, introducing vocabulary, labeling feelings and encouraging the child to think of the next step in the play sequence.) **Intervene when necessary** to gently guide children through difficulties or frustrations and to become more aware of the possibilities. Adult involvement decreases over time as children gain experience and independence in negotiating. Sometimes “hanging back in wonder” is the best approach in allowing children’s play to evolve naturally.

8. **Offer play materials and props that encourage imagination** and can be used in varied ways, building on children’s individual preferences. **Add a few new props or toys** from time to time to

maintain interest and expand play options. Rotate or put away play items for a while, then bring them out at a later date for the child to use anew.

9. **Adopt a playful attitude** as an adult. Model the use of materials in innovative ways. Play with language, song, rhyme and storytelling. Share your own sense of humor, wonder and joy in life.

10. **Avoid over-scheduling with structured activities and passive entertainment** for children. The self-reliance and inner resourcefulness that free play promotes helps develop skills necessary for later school success.

### **Tips About Toys**

1. Choose toys that are durable, safe, and can be used in a variety of ways over time. Simplicity of design is often a clue to quality. Watch for small parts, sharp edges, and pinching mechanisms.

2. Natural materials such as sand, water, stones, sticks and wood allow children to build and create. Store-bought toys like wooden blocks and plastic building toys provide similar opportunities.

3. Be open to multiple uses and creative combinations of materials that children will initiate. Allow children to fully explore their own interests and imagination, resisting the cultural and commercial pressures of gender stereotyping, consumerism and glorification of violence in play.

4. Listen to children and observe their interests in play when making toy selections. But, be wary of fads and the latest consumer novelty. Resist using the purchase of a toy to placate a child or replace personal attention.

5. Remember that children are naturally inclined to find a way to play with ANYTHING! You might purchase a “state-of-the-art educational toy” and your child will be more intrigued with the box!

6. Children may be slow to warm up to a new toy of your choosing but if you play with them, the excitement you show and the interaction with you will help them discover ways to enjoy and explore this new item.

7. Store and rotate toys that seem to have lost your child’s interest. A few months later, the toy may have new fascination and the child may revisit the toy, using it at a different level as he/she grows. ie. board books (purchased for babies) can be wonderful “first readers” for beginning readers. Children will delight in being able to read a familiar favorite to themselves, their parents, or especially a younger child who looks up to them in awe.

### **RESOURCES:**

Cross, Gary. Kids’ Stuff : Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood. Harvard University Press, 1997.

Einon, Dorothy. Play with a Purpose: Learning games for children six weeks to ten years. Pantheon, 1985.

Elkind, David. “Thanks for the Memory – The lasting value of play” Young Children, (monthly journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.)

Feeney, Christensen & Moravcik. Who Are We in the Lives of Children? Merrill, 1987.

Frost, Joe L. & Sunderlin, Sylvia. ed. When Children Play. Assoc. for Childhood International, 1985.

Jones, Elizabeth. "Playing to Get Smart" Young Children , 1997.

Jones, Elizabeth & Reynolds, Gretchen. The Play's The Thing. Teachers College Press, 1992.

Paley, Vivian. The Importance of Fantasy Play. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Websites:

Search: Importance of play for young children – 20 pages of sites listed

Examples:

Child development and early childhood educational practices:

[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

[www.goodbeginnings.org](http://www.goodbeginnings.org)

[www.developingchild.net](http://www.developingchild.net)

[www.hyper-parenting.com](http://www.hyper-parenting.com)

[www.teachandlearn.net](http://www.teachandlearn.net)

Project/Activity ideas:

[www.allianceforchildhood.com/projects/play/playactivities.htm](http://www.allianceforchildhood.com/projects/play/playactivities.htm)

[www.letsplay.buffalo.edu/PLAY/play.html](http://www.letsplay.buffalo.edu/PLAY/play.html)

Play therapy:

[www.cfw.tufts.edu/viewtopics.asp](http://www.cfw.tufts.edu/viewtopics.asp)

[www.kidsource.com](http://www.kidsource.com)

## ❖❖❖ LISTEN ❖❖❖

Communication skills are a key indicator for a well-adjusted life. Parents who spend time talking with and listening to their children are making an important investment to equip their children for success.

A child feels valued and important when parents give their undivided attention to what they have to say. Listening to your child builds their confidence and strengthens their self worth. And parents gain valuable insights into their child's ideas, fears, joys and questions.

Listening involves your body language, facial expressions, gestures and posture. If for example your arms are crossed, your eyes keep checking the clock, your face wears a scowl or you have your back to your child while you continue with your work, valuable listening is not taking place. Your child will quickly get the message that you are not really interested in what they have to say and that they are not very important at that moment. In busy daily life it is not always possible to drop everything, sit on the floor and give your child your undivided attention. But it is important that you take advantage of as many opportunities as possible to stop, listen and enjoy your child.

### Ten Tips

To make the most of conversation time with your child remember these tips:

-**The eyes have it!** When listening to a child it is important to make eye contact and to be at a child's eye level.

-**Do not interrupt.** Nod your head, offer an "hmmm", but let them finish their thoughts or stories before you speak.

-**Validate their feelings and ideas** through a response which shows you heard what they said and what they meant.

-Realize that **what the child has to say is important** and take it seriously.

-**Give your undivided attention.** Stop what you are doing, sit with them, smile, give a hug and pay attention to their words.

-**Allow your children to express their feelings.** Help them label their feelings.

-**Give prompts** when needed to get your child to begin talking. Ask about their day, comment on their play, share something from your day.

-Remember, **you are a model** and your child is learning how to be a good listener from you.

-When responding **speak slowly** and clearly with age appropriate vocabulary.

-**Positive responses** from adults encourage communication.

### Begin in the Beginning

The different cries, sounds and movements of an infant convey meaning. A responsive adult who has listened to the meaning of the baby's body language and utterances is providing the first experience for the infant of being understood and valued.



The first words of the toddler emerge between 12 and 24 months. Listen to their words, repeat them with a smile, and enjoy their energy.

Preschoolers are full of questions, stories, statement and requests. Listen for clues about things which are unspoken and feelings which are not expressed.

Listen to the ideas, complaints, fears and excitement of kindergartners. Be aware of what might be motivating them.

If you suspect your child has delays in speech or language development check with your pediatrician for referral to local resources for evaluation. Early detection and therapy, if needed, will reap huge dividends for your child.

## RESOURCES

Faber, Adele and Mazlish, Elaine. How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk. Avon Books, 1982.

## ❖❖❖ TALK ❖❖❖

**Talking to babies, toddlers, and other young children boosts their brain power and feeds their heart. Surrounding children with our words is one very important way that we nurture them and help them grow smarter. Language is the building block of relationships and the basis of all learning.**

### Surround Your Infant with Language

- Talk to your baby throughout the day. Tell him what you are doing and what is happening in your home. Name things in the baby's environment, ie. diaper, shirt, ball, bear. The important thing is to continue to talk to your baby all day long.
- Sing to your baby.
- Read simple board books to your baby. Young infants prefer books with one simple picture on a page.
- Make cooing sounds and respond to your baby's sounds. Repeat the babbling sounds your baby begins to make.
- Talk slowly and directly to your infant and make eye contact. It is important that the baby see your face when you are talking.

These important exchanges will support the language development of your child. As infants listen to the familiar voices of their family they learn to babble and later to speak. Conversely language development may be delayed if children are not regularly talked to, sung to and cuddled.

### Talk with Your Toddler

As your child begins to master some words you can begin to have early "two way conversations." Your child may say, "Cracker." Take advantage of every opportunity to engage your child with simple, but full sentences. ie. "The crackers are in the red box. I'll give you one cracker." Obviously it would be easy to just reach in the box and say, "Here."; but the more language your child hears the more understanding your child will develop of sentence structure, the more vocabulary will be built, and the more fun you will have with your child.

When children reach the age of two a favorite word is “why?” Rather than be annoyed with this constant question grasp the opportunity to sit at eye level with your child and provide simple answers. Not only are you providing language models and new words, but you are communicating value and attention.

### **Talk to Build Relationship**

Children are not just learning how to say words, but they are also learning about relationships and about social interaction. As parents use a different tone of voice to comfort, to praise, or to prohibit an action the infant and toddler are learning social cues.

Silly talk and laughter and sharing affectionate exchanges are important “talk” between parent and child and help build those important bonds of trust.

Parent talk should include descriptive praise. When children hear “great job” for everything they do it has little meaning after awhile, but if instead parents take the time to describe a child’s action value is transferred. For example, rather than “great job” say “Thank you for putting your shoes in the closet.” or “Your painting is very cheerful with all of the red and yellow paint you used.” It takes more time, it takes thinking before you speak, but it communicates to the child that you paid attention and in the case of the shoes reinforces a desired action.

When you share your feelings and ideas with your child and listen to theirs you are providing a safe place for them to express what is on their mind.

As children begin to play with other children it is important that they learn to use their words to solve problems and to plan their play. Children who have had practice in their home with being listened to and talked with will more easily adapt this important social skill. Talk through issues with your child rather than imposing quick solutions. Listen to their ideas for solving problems.

### **Talk to Share Ideas and Knowledge**

As children grow they will have ever expanding experiences, will be eager to learn about all kinds of interesting things and will want to share what they are learning. This is when talk will become more complex and will be filled with information sharing. Trips to museums, walks around the neighborhood, and visits to the park and the library will support children’s growing curiosity about their world and will provide many opportunities for parents to add vocabulary and insights and talk about ideas. Reading with your child also provides opportunities to discuss concepts and ideas.

Dinner table and bed time conversations can be special times for sharing things learned or experienced that day. This is a time for parents to share their experiences too.

### **Fill Your Home with Talk**

Talk to show affection and care

Talk to share feelings

Talk to problem solve

Talk to have fun together

Talk to communicate ideas

Talk to discuss plans

Talk to share information and knowledge

Talk to connect with your child

It is easy to fall into the habit of talking only to give directions and reminders. Make your home a place where talk is valued and practiced.

## **RESOURCES**

*Strategies for Talking With Kids* [www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids](http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids)

*Winning Ways to Talk to Children* [www.umaine.edu/publications/4077e](http://www.umaine.edu/publications/4077e)

## ❖❖❖ HUG ❖❖❖

### A Hug Is . . .

-a universal expression of human connection that non-verbally affirms a person's worth and validates their feelings.

-a physical gesture with far-reaching emotional content.

- a simple, tangible embrace of a person communicating a wide range of concerns and lessons.

### Hugs Help Humans . . .

Human beings have an instinctive need for touch and thrive only by being cared for by others. . . . .

There is growing evidence that touch is crucial to an infant's cognitive and physical development.

(Newsweek, Special edition 2000, Your Child Birth to Three – The World of the Senses)

Primary care of a baby requires holding and hugging. Responsive, consistent physical attention provides a profound sense of safety and contentment that contributes to a child's emotional health. Feeling valued by others and building basic trust in his/her physical security is important for a child's sense of self-worth.

Critical bonds of attachment between child and care-giving adult are formed by using hugs, shining eyes, and a loving voice tone to build children's basic trust in adults as helpful people whose expressions of approval are important and pleasurable. (Honig, Alice, *Secure relationships, Nurturing Infant/Toddler Attachment in Early Care Settings*, 2002.)

We know that children learn from experience. The important communication of hugs, cuddles and touch for the infant is also important for growing children and adults. Hugs express a range of emotional connection through positive physical contact. By modeling gentle, respectful touch, adults show compassion, empathy, affection, playfulness and joy through nonverbal communication.

“Caring about others does not simply spring up unbidden from children's hearts. Children grow up learning to care about others by experiencing the devotion of another person.” (Smith, Charles A., *First Steps to Mighty Courage*, Young Children, Jan. 2005)

### Hugs All Around . . .

- empower children with a positive self-image,
- promote pro-social behavior,
- demonstrate a healthy approach to physical contact between people,
- aid in reducing stress and
- provide comfort.

### Hug-Ability? Hug-Awareness?

Be aware that boundaries and traditions for physical contact and displays of affection vary among families and between cultures. An individual child's temperament and sensory preferences may affect the comfort level, frequency and circumstances by which a hug is welcomed or not as well.

## Tips On Hugging

1. Hug, kiss, touch, massage babies to stimulate their tactile responses and give them lots of positive attention.
2. Communicate with a hug in a variety of ways. Hug to comfort. Hug to say hello or good-bye. Hug to thank. Hug to congratulate. Hug for closeness to focus on an activity like reading or writing or doing a puzzle. Hug to say you are sorry.
3. Take cues from the child. Open your arms as an invitation. The child will come to you if a hug is welcome at that time. This also models an approach children can use with each other to promote the concept of mutual agreement about physical interactions and respecting each other's say over their own bodies.
4. Rough and tumble play is another expression of affection and delight in physical exchange. This activity helps children gain practice in reading physical and social cues about limits and choices that vary among individuals. Natural excitement and interest in this kind of physical play engages children in learning about their bodies, emotions and social communication.
5. Remember to pay attention to individual preferences and cultural sensitivity when giving physical affection to any person.

## Children's Books - Great reads to share with your young child

Alborough, Jez, Hug. Scholastic, 2001.

Barrett, Joyce Durham, Willie's Not the Hugging Kind. Harper's Collins, 1989.

Horning, Sandra, The Giant Hug. Alfred A. Kopf, 2005.

Leijten, Aileen, Hugging Hour. Philomel Books, 2009.

McLerran, Alice, Hugs. Scholastic, 1993.

I will not play Tug O War,  
I'd rather play Hug O'War;  
Where everyone hugs, instead of tugs,  
And everyone giggles and rolls on the rug.  
Where everyone kisses, and everyone grins;  
Everyone cuddles, and everyone wins.

-Shel Silverstein

## ❖❖❖ EXPLORE ❖❖❖

Children are born with an in-born sense of wonder. It is important for adults to support a child's curiosity and drive to explore.

### **To Explore is.....**

To investigate

To recognize similarities and differences

To search out - to look for problems to solve

To inquire - to ask questions

To research - to find the answers

To interact with the environment at home, in the neighborhood and community

To observe, to reflect and record

Through exploring a child gains information about an object. In exploration children ask, "What is this?" "What can it do?" The inquiry process enables familiarization and feelings of competence and security ("This is something I know").

Play is the perfect medium for encouraging the all-important habits of exploration, perseverance and risk taking. Play has no boundaries and there is no penalty for failing to reach a goal. Both are important components in exploration.

From playful exploration children gain the intuitive understandings they'll need to grasp formal scientific concepts later in school.

Children are born with an active sense of wonder, an innate curiosity. Through exploring – touching, tasting, looking, listening and smelling an infant begins to learn about the world. This process expands and continues for the toddler and the young child.

Adults have an important role to play to encourage and support exploration.

### **Infants Are Ready To Learn**

Provide crib mobiles, music, and toys with various textures, colors and sounds for an infant's exploration. Rotate the toys regularly for fresh stimulation.

Create soft obstacle courses for the crawling infant. Provide board books, soft toys, toys which make noise, toys which stack or fit inside, and safe teething toys.

Provide plenty of opportunities for babies to explore their surroundings safely. Remove small objects which a child could swallow and fragile items which could be broken. Protect the child from stairs and secure doors on cabinets which contain items which are inappropriate for a crawling infant. Since too many negative messages may discourage a child's exploration, create an environment which is safe and inviting for the young child with a minimum of "No's" needed.

Place toys and objects appropriate for the child to explore within easy reach and then enjoy watching your child make discoveries about his/her world.

### **Toddlers Are Filled With Curiosity**

Toddlers are walking, running, opening doors and drawers and want to see and do everything. It is important to allow your child to try things with close supervision. Adults are important participants as they name objects, ask questions, clap approval, laugh and play to encourage the constant and natural curiosity of the toddler.

Toddlers love things they can bang together to make noise such as two rhythm sticks, two small blocks, or two pan lids.

Providing a small plastic bucket or basket and items to place in and remove from the container fascinates a toddler. Plastic animals, small wooden blocks, empty thread spools, sponges, or other safe and easy to handle objects are appropriate for this activity.

Toddlers also enjoy playing with water. A shallow dishpan of water and containers such as measuring cups and small empty plastic bottles, plastic boats, fish or ducks and even some bubbles and a wire whisk makes a great exploration opportunity for the toddler. CAUTION: Never leave a young child unattended when playing with water.

Take your toddler for a walk to the end of the block. Take time to look at the trees, flowers, grass, neighbor's dog, squirrel in the tree, and all of the other interesting things along the way.

Toddlers ask "Why?" frequently. Their question is real and gives a great opportunity for conversation. The explanations should be simple and brief. Don't be surprised if each answer you give is greeted with another "Why?" from your toddler.

### **Preschoolers Are Adding To Their Knowledge**

The preschool age child will continue to seek knowledge actively and playfully. Their explorations may seem random, but the child is learning steadily through play. Each day they are adding to their knowledge base of shapes and colors, cause and effect, plants and insects, weather, animals, and many other facts and concepts to understand their world.

An especially intriguing activity for the preschooler is taking apart machines. Provide a nonworking hair dryer, toaster or telephone. Remove the electrical cords and inspect for sharp edges. A screw driver is all that is needed for the child to begin an inspection of what is inside the machine and from there a beginning knowledge base of how things work. Ask questions such as "What parts do you think were put in first? Why? What makes it run?"

Help the preschooler start a collection of found treasures such as rocks, shells, leaves, insects, feathers, or other objects of interest. Provide a display space or special box for the collection, a magnifying glass, magnet, ruler, pencil and paper for exploring the items and recording drawings and information.

Visit interesting places with your child, including your own backyard, and model a spirit of exploration. Good spots for exploration are the zoo, the woods, the conservatory, the park, a pond, any interesting business place, farmer's market, a garden, the library, museums, the beach and any place that is interesting to you or your child.

## Adults Are Difference Makers

Adults support a child's exploration by asking open-ended questions such as "What does that feel like?" "What can you do with this?" "How is this made?" The fact that you are showing an interest in what the child is involved in exploring and that you are asking for their ideas rather than always supplying information is valuable in supporting the child's confidence in exploration.

Adult conversation and response to children's questions is an important ingredient in the child's ability to make sense of their discoveries. Once a child has expressed their ideas and tried them out, it is appropriate for the adult to provide some labels and information. This should never be the first step however. Let the child predict, test and draw conclusions first. Only provide accurate information when it is sought by the child.

Adults should suspend judgment and instruction. Free from worry about their performance, children can try anything, experiment and enjoy exploration.

Adults should model excitement about investigation and discoveries and a willingness to take risks themselves in trying new things.

Adults are able to provide interesting and varied experiences and excursions to spark a child's curiosity.

It is important that the adults in a child's life allow the child plenty of time for play and discovery.

## RESOURCES

I Spy books published by Scholastic Inc. are great for visual exploration.

Allen, Pamela. Mr. Archimedes' Bath. Harper Collins, 1980.

Hoban, Tana. Look! Look! Look!, Scholastic, 1988.

Steiner, Joan. Look-Alikes Jr. Little, Brown and Company, 1999.

Ziebel, Peter. Look Closer. Scholastic, 1989.

Rockwell, Sherwood and Williams. Hug a Tree. Gryphon House, Inc., 1986. Resource book of outdoor nature exploration ideas.

Sherwood, Williams, Rockwell. More Mudpies to Magnets. Gryphon House, Inc., 1990. A source of interesting science explorations for young children.

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## ❖❖❖ COOK HEALTHY ❖❖❖

Dietary habits are established early in life and will significantly affect your child's success today as well as their future health. To improve your child's energy, physical health and success in school pay close attention to your child's diet.

### **Did you know?**

- 1. Food habits and the ability to eat healthy are learned. Parents are the child's most important role model when it comes to eating a well balanced, healthy diet.**
- 2. Proper nutrition and water are essential for healthy brain development.**
- 3. Family meal times, healthy snacks and a good breakfast, mixed with ample exercise, are all ingredients that help add up to a healthy child.**

### **Parent Power**

Parents have tremendous influence over the attitudes children develop about food and healthy eating habits. The best thing a parent can do is model a healthy eating lifestyle, which means eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and limiting fast foods and sweet treats.

Get your children involved in cooking. If they make it they are more likely to eat it. Children can chop, spread, mix and measure and have a great time as a helper to mom or dad.

On trips to the grocery let your child choose a new fruit and/or vegetable in the produce section. It is fun to try something new.

Instead of focusing on limiting access to treats, introduce your child (the younger the better) to a wide range of nutritious foods and encourage the whole family to eat them.

### **What Your Child Eats Counts**

To boost thinking and learning it is recommended children eat diets with plentiful amounts of eggs, fish, turkey, chicken, yogurt, nuts, fruits, whole grains and leafy green vegetables. A variety of food choices daily will assure that your child has a balanced diet.

Limit the fat content of your child's diet; however, some fat is necessary for proper development. Good sources of fat are found in almonds, walnuts, peanuts, avocados and salmon. Healthy oils to use for cooking and salads are olive oil and flaxseed oil. When reading food labels it is important to know that unsaturated fats are the good fats. Avoid hydrogenated oils and limit saturated fats. These are found in foods such as potato chips, many crackers, hot dogs, luncheon meats, margarine and processed foods, so limit these items in your child's diet.

Healthy cooking methods are roast, steam, broil and bake. Avoid frying.

Everyone should eat five fruits and vegetables per day. If you include fruit and vegetable choices throughout the day in meals and snacks it won't be difficult.

Avoid white flour and highly processed foods. Great sources of grain are whole wheat bread, old fashioned oatmeal, brown rice, whole grain cereals without added sugar, corn tortillas and whole grain pastas.

Children's stomachs are small. It makes sense for children to eat five to six times a day (with smaller portions) rather than the traditional breakfast, lunch and dinner.



Include a variety of textures and colors on your child's plate to make the meal appealing to the eye and the palate.

Remember: The deeper the color of the food the more vitamin power!

Calcium is important for strong and healthy bones and teeth. To insure that children have sufficient calcium in their diet it is recommended that young children have at least two servings of milk or dairy products per day. Check the *Food Pyramid* to learn about serving sizes.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children drink whole milk until the age of two. After age two skim or 1% milk is recommended. Low fat and skim milk contain the same amount of calcium as whole milk.

The second most important source of bone development is exercise. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends at least one hour of active exercise per day.

No pop for young children. The high phosphorus content of pop makes it difficult for the body to absorb calcium, even if drinking enough milk.

Other sources of calcium are dark green leafy vegetables, broccoli, chickpeas, lentils, canned sardines, salmon and cottage cheese.

Many children get too much sugar, too often in their diets. Sugar rich foods tend to be full of empty calories and often displace nutritious foods children need.

Reminder: Fruit juice is high in sugar. Diluting fruit juice with water is a good idea.

### **Water Works Wonders**

Children who do not get enough water may appear bored, listless and drowsy.

Children should drink plenty of water throughout the day. Remember to take water bottles along on outings and have water available indoors and out throughout the day.

Pop is not a substitute for water. The sugar and caffeine in pop actually deplete the body of fluid.

Fruit juice is high in sugar content and should be limited to six ounces per day. Although not a substitute for water, fruit juice can be diluted with water to decrease the amount of sugar and add water to the diet.

### **Family Meal Time is Important**

A pleasant, relaxed eating environment helps young children develop positive attitudes about food. As often as possible eat together as a family.

Conversation around the table has many advantages. It is a time for families to stay connected, to share joys of the day, to discuss problems with playmates, to hear about the parent's day, to laugh about funny things which happened that day, and to make plans for tomorrow. Best of all, it makes mealtime a social experience.

Mealtime should never be a time to turn on the TV. Nor should it be a time to discuss topics which might cause bickering.

Try giving your meal an around the world theme occasionally. Pick a country and let children taste interesting foods.

Have fun with variety. An occasional picnic in the park, dinner on the deck or candles on the table add spice to family meal time.

Research by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation found that the one thing National Merit Scholars had in common was that they came from families who regularly ate dinner together.

### **Snack Time Can Be a Nutrition Booster**

Snacks are an important part of a child's well balanced diet. Make the most of snack time to provide nutrients which may be missing from the rest of the day. But beware of the danger of adding sugar and unhealthy oils to your child's diet through snacks.

Plan ahead so that your refrigerator and cupboards are stocked with healthy snacks to avoid the temptation of grabbing a quick cookie or cracker box from the shelf.

### **Healthy Snack Ideas**

Fresh and dried fruit

Raw vegetables

Hummus with vegetables or whole grain crackers

Popcorn (children over 4)

Salsa and baked chips

Trail mix made with any combination of sugar free cereal, small pretzels, raisins or other dried fruit

Cheese

Plain yogurt

Cottage cheese,

Applesauce (unsweetened)

Pudding

Fruit popsicles

Pretzel sticks

Sugar free cereals

### **The Power of Breakfast**

Food is the fuel necessary for the mind and body to function. By breakfast a child has been without food for 12 to 14 hours. A hearty breakfast is necessary so that the child is ready to meet the challenges of their day. A healthy breakfast should include dairy, fruit, whole grain and protein.

### **Get a Move On**

Active children need more calories and are hungrier than inactive children. Children with a big appetite are more likely to eat a variety of foods and therefore have a better balanced diet.

Physical exercise stimulates healthy appetites, burns calories, builds muscle, improves coordination and develops bones.

The best way to reinforce a child's exercise is for an adult to play with the child. Ride bikes, take walks, go for short jogs, visit the park, explore the woods or beach, play ball of any kind, turn on the music and dance, jump, skip, hop and have fun.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends young children have at least one hour of active exercise daily.

Sign your child up for an activity which is physically active such as tumbling class, ice skating, swimming, soccer or dance.

Be sure your child plays outside for a while every day, weather permitting.

### **RESOURCES**

[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

[www.cnpp.usda.gov/](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/)

American Academy of Pediatrics

Kids Health

Center for Nutrition and Policy – Children’s food pyramid

## ❖❖❖ LIMIT TV ❖❖❖

Children today are being raised in a media enriched environment. In order for a child to develop their potential for creativity, curiosity, physical vitality and social skills parents would be wise to limit the amount and type of viewing of television, videos, movies and computer games for their child.

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises against children under two watching television at all. It further recommends that children older than two have screen time limited to 30 to 60 minutes per day and that what is viewed be closely monitored by the parent.

Time children spend with media is time they are not spending on more valuable activities – active physical play and exercise, creative play, social interaction with family and friends, assisting with household chores, **READING**, using their imagination, art activity, working a puzzle, playing a game, etc. All of these are important for a healthy mind, a strong body and positive social skills. Television on the other hand is a passive and sedentary activity, which does not contribute to a child's growth.

### **The Impact of Media**

It is said that by the age of 18, the average child in America will have viewed about 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 16,000 murders. There are 3 to 5 violent acts per hour in prime time, versus 20 to 25 violent acts per hour on Saturday morning cartoons. Sixty-six percent of children's programming has violence. Equally troublesome is that violence on the Internet is difficult to quantify, but is prevalent.

Media violence affects children's behavior by:

- increasing aggressiveness,
- increasing their fear of becoming a victim
- making them less sensitive to violence and victims of violence
- increases their appetite for more violence in entertainment and in real life
- And media often fails to show the consequences of violence (pain, death, and/or punishment)

Longitudinal studies tracking viewing habits and behavior patterns found that 8-year-old boys, who viewed the most violent programs growing up, were the most likely to engage in aggressive and delinquent behavior by age 18, and serious criminal behavior by age 30.

(Dr. Leonard Eron, University of Illinois at Chicago, Testimony before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, Subcommittee on Communication, June 12, 1995.)

TV viewing is a passive activity. Excessive amounts of time viewing media results in decreased physical activity and fitness, and is sometimes linked to obesity, insomnia, and poorer performance in school.

Reading skills may be diminished by TV viewing. Time spent with media displaces book time and according to some experts affects the physical structure of the brain. TV may undermine family time due to the fact that families watching a screen are not engaged with each other. Families who watch little or no TV find that they have more time to spend in engaging and interactive activities as a family.

### **Play is influenced**

What children view influences how children relate to others and how they play. If too much violence is viewed, then play will be aggressive; if problems are solved on the screen with name calling and sarcasm, then the child will use those same methods in play with peers.

A study conducted by Nielson Media Research in 1993, reported that the average American child watches TV 28 hours a week, more than the amount of time they spend in school.

There are many toys available that are linked to specific television programs. These toys may appeal to your child, but can limit your child's imagination and may encourage the imitation of violent behavior. These toys will encourage the acting out of the media story, rather than encouraging the child to be inventive and imaginative in play.

Super heros have tremendous appeal to young children. Help your child understand that the super heros they see are just people in costumes called actors. Encourage them to use their imagination to create their own characters and nonviolent ways to solve problems.

Too often social skills are being learned from TV and videos rather than through real life experiences with other children.

Additionally the action on TV is often in 30 second to one minute segments. This fast pace may result in a shorter attention span.

### **What is real?**

Young children believe what they see because their brains are still developing. Children do not differentiate real from pretend until they are age five or older. Children younger than five interpret things literally and thus much of the content of TV programming is inappropriate for the young child. They can be confused and misled by what they see. It is important to view programs with your child and explain the difference between make-believe and real.

### **Parents can make a difference**

It is highly recommended that you limit the engagement with media to thirty to sixty minutes per day for your child over the age of two. (Children younger than two should not watch any TV.) Some families have found limiting TV and video viewing to weekends to be effective.

Do not turn on the TV during meals. Instead use this time for interaction as a family.

It is highly recommended that you not have a TV in your child's room where it is more difficult to monitor content and amount of time spent viewing.

Carefully select the shows your family watches. Monitor for violence, inappropriate sexual content and abusive language.

Not all TV is bad. There are educational TV shows which are of high quality and are age appropriate. Choose wisely and watch shows with your children and discuss what you see.

Be a model for your child in your own TV viewing habits. If you don't like what you see happening on the screen, turn off the TV.

And don't use TV as a babysitter, nor as a reward or punishment.

### **Rather than TV viewing.....**

Engage children in chores such as laundry folding, table setting and raking leaves.

Promote creative and imaginative play by choosing toys that can be used in a variety of ways and will be fun and engaging over time. Blocks, art materials, building toys, dress up clothes and props, puzzles,

board games and books are all excellent choices. Books with tapes, music and instruments are also important. Toys that can be used in only a prescribed way are not recommended.

Encourage active play in the yard or the park daily. Running, climbing, jumping and skipping are important for a healthy child's development.

Read books with your child, act out the stories, make up stories together.

Engage your child in cooking projects.

### **Remember**

T.V. and videos may have a negative impact on children's development as media has an enormous power in determining what children play with and how they play with their peers.

Screen time is time children are not interacting with friends and family and time they are not engaged in creative or physical activities.

Parents need to take an active role.

### **RESOURCES**

Conner, Bobbi, Unplugged Play. Workman Publishing. [www.unpluggedplay.com](http://www.unpluggedplay.com)

Levin, D. E., Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture. National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC (1998).

Slaby, R. G., Roedell, W. C., Arezzo, D., & Hendrix, K. Early Violence Prevention Tools for Teachers of Young Children. National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC (1995).

"Defining Media Violence", "Family Discussions About Television", and "Watch What Your Children Watch". Media Awareness Network. [www.media-awareness.ca/english](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english)

"Media Violence and Media Literacy", American Academy of Pediatrics. [aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/media.htm](http://aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/media.htm)

