



What Parents Should Know... About the Important Role They Play in Their Child's Early Development

The first three years of life are the most intensive period for acquiring speech and language skills. These skills develop best in a world that is rich with sounds, sights, and consistent exposure to the speech and language of others. If these critical periods are allowed to pass without exposure to language, language will be more difficult to learn.

National Institutes of Health

Parents Create the Environment That Nurtures Development

Research tells us that babies learn from the moment they're born, with the first three years a remarkable period of child development. Children learn to move, talk, communicate, play and behave as a result of what they hear, see and experience in their environments. Babies learn to lift their heads to look around, roll over, crawl and walk. They learn they can make sounds, and mimic what they hear. They learn that their behavior can create a desired result — a cry may get them fed, "babble" will be rewarded with attention and conversation from someone near them. This pattern of incidental learning relies on parents, caregivers and family members using ordinary opportunities to interact with their child throughout the day, creating an environment that models and reinforces skills, exposes children to language and information, and rewards learning and desired behavior. Incidental learning is natural, engaging, memorable, enjoyable and successful.

When a child has barriers to incidental learning — 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, experiences may need to be repeated, and extra explanations and descriptions could be necessary for him or her to learn what other children learn simply by watching and imitating. Professionals can assist with direct teaching (speech, occupational, physical, visual, and other therapies) to boost a child's development, and will provide families with instruction and suggestions on how to incorporate therapeutic techniques into everyday life. (If not, parents should ask.) Parents, caregivers and family members can integrate therapeutic strategies into the fabric of daily life, mimicking the incidental learning opportunities that are proven to be successful.





Nurturing Child Development *(continued)*

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. Toys, television and technology are no substitute for the human interaction (cuddling, talking, and playing) that babies and children need for their early growth and development.

In the first year...

Babies learn to focus their vision, reach out, explore, and learn about the things that are around them. Learning language is more than making sounds or saying "ma-ma" and "da-da." Listening, understanding, and knowing the names of people and things are all part of language development. During this stage, babies are developing bonds of love and trust with their parents and others as part of social and emotional development. The way parents cuddle, hold, and play with their baby provides the foundation for how their child will interact with them and others. Babies need safe spaces to develop their physical skills and explore their environment as they learn to control their bodies, crawl and walk.

Parents can help their baby's development:

- 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 cuddling and holding your baby during feeding, dressing, bathing and reading.
- Play games such as peek-a-boo, hide and seek, and teach songs that require hand movements (such as Itsy Bitsy Spider).
- Give your baby toys or objects that encourage him to use his hands.
- Have floor play time daily in a safe area with room for her to move and explore.
- Provide your baby lots of safe places to explore at home, in the neighborhood and in the community.

During years two and three...

Toddlers are moving around more, and are aware of themselves and their surroundings. Their desire to explore new objects and people also is increasing. During this stage, toddlers will show greater independence; begin to show defiant behavior; recognize themselves in pictures or a mirror; and imitate the behavior of others, especially adults and older children. Toddlers should be able to recognize the names of familiar people and objects, form simple phrases and sentences, follow simple instructions and directions, and express a wide range of emotions.

Parents can help their toddler's development:

- Ask her to name objects, colors, body parts, animals, etc. and play matching games (sorting by shape and color).
- Teach simple songs like Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, or other cultural childhood rhymes.
- Have a special reading time each day, talking about the pictures and story. Have them help you turn the pages.
- Help develop your toddler's language by talking with her and adding to words she starts. For example, if your toddler says "baba," you can respond, "Yes, you are right that is a bottle."

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A Language Tool... “Three Ts” Talking Techniques

Dana Suskind, author of *Thirty Million Words: Building a Child’s Brain* has developed the “three Ts” talking technique parents/caregivers can use to “talk” to their babies and toddlers:

Tune In: Notice and talk about what your child is focusing on. Respond when a child communicates — whether a coo or a cry.

Talk More: Narrate (explain) day to day routines and activities, from diaper changes to getting dressed or undressed. Describe details, “Mommy is taking off your diaper. It is so wet. Here is a nice dry diaper. Does that feel better?”

Take Turns: Keep the communication going. Respond to your child’s sounds, gestures and words---and give him or her the time and opportunity to respond to you. Ask questions that invite more than yes or no answers.

Other Tips:

Embrace Baby Talk — not made up words but a positive, happy tone and sing song rhythm.

Read to your child — even babies. Point out colors, shapes, animals, objects and so on, and engage children in doing the same.

Bilingual families should talk to their child in their native language, it will be a much richer conversation. But expose the child to the language of the broader community as well.

Nurturing Child Development (continued)

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- Encourage your child to say words instead of pointing.
- Encourage your child’s growing independence by letting him help with dressing and feeding himself. Encourage him to drink from a cup and use a spoon, even if it is messy.
- Encourage your child to pretend and pretend play.
- Encourage your child to play with other children, when supports and supervision are in place.
- Help your child play with blocks, toys, sand or clay. Do simple puzzles, coloring or painting projects.
- Give your child attention and praise when she follows instructions and shows positive behavior.
- Limit attention for defiant behavior like tantrums. Teach your child acceptable ways to show that he’s upset.
- 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.



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Nurturing Child Development (continued)

Three to five year old children...

Preschoolers have growing independence and begin to focus more on adults and children outside of the family. They want to explore and ask about the things around them even more. Their interactions with family and those around them will help to shape their personality and their own ways of thinking and moving. During this stage, typically developing children should be able to ride a tricycle, use safety scissors, notice a difference between girls and boys, help to dress and undress themselves, play with other children, recall part of a story, and sing a song.



Parents can help their preschooler's development:

- Continue to read to your child daily and nurture a love of reading. Libraries, community centers and bookstores often have free or very low cost reading programs and activities.
- Help your child develop good language skills by speaking in complete sentences and using "grown up" words. Help her to use the correct words and phrases.
- Create an activity box for your child with crayons, paper, coloring books, scissors, glue, scraps of cloth or yarn, old magazines, etc. and do art activities with your child.
- Play counting games and matching games, making use of everyday activities like climbing steps, folding clothes, putting away groceries and so on.
- Encourage your child to use their imagination and provide things like dress up clothes, cooking sets, building blocks, etc.
- Join play groups or go to places where there are children to encourage your child to play with others. Encourage your child to use words, share toys, and take turns choosing games. Allow them to resolve their own problems but be nearby to help out if needed.
- Help your child identify her emotions. Help her learn to calm herself and solve problems when she is upset.
- Give your child a limited number of simple choices (for example, deciding what to wear, when to play, and what to eat for snack).
- Provide your child with age-appropriate play equipment, such as a ball or tricycle.
- Go to a local playground or play area. Let your preschooler choose what to play in an unstructured way. Teach your child to pump their legs on the swing, and how to use the monkey bars, slide and other play equipment.

For families concerned about their child's development, resources are available to complete developmental screenings. The results of the screening will determine if a more thorough evaluation should be conducted, so that areas of delay can be identified and appropriate intervention services may begin.

- Share with your child's primary care provider your concerns and ask for a developmental screening or referral to have one completed. Screening results of concern may lead to more comprehensive evaluations.

- Families can seek free developmental screenings through the Birth to Three Connections Program (1-800-305-3064) for infants and toddlers, or the local school district for children ages three and above. If the Birth to Three Program or school district screening indicates a developmental concern, the child will be referred for an evaluation at no cost to parents. (See pages 7 and 8 for information on these programs.)

SD Parent Connection is here to assist families as they work to ensure that the needs of their children are met. Please contact us if we can be of assistance.

Content Source: Division of Birth Defects, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Resources for Parents to Encourage, Measure Child Development

Wondering what developmental milestones your child should be reaching? Seeking ideas on what you can do to boost their development? Free resources are available to help you answer these and other questions!

Easter Seals, through support from the CVS Caremark Charitable Trust, provides parents with **FREE** access to the *Ages & Stages Questionnaires®*, Third Edition, one of many screening tools. Be sure to share the completed questionnaire and results with the professional conducting your child's developmental screening. http://es.easterseals.com/site/PageNavigator/ntlc10_mffc_homepageasq.html

Zero to Three Parent Portal: On demand videos, articles, tip sheets, and a new "From Baby to Big Kid" e-newsletter that includes age-based information about child development, articles on child-rearing issues and challenges, parent-child play activities that promote bonding and learning, and research on child development and what it means for parents. www.zerotothree.org/parenting-resources/

Learn the Signs-Act Early: Track your child's development, birth through age 5, with this series of developmental skills (milestones) that most children can do at a certain age. View or print positive parenting tips for infants through teenagers. Learn about specific disabilities or special health care needs. Download and print, or order, materials including:

- *Amazing Me*, a book for children ages 2-4 that also shows parents what to look for as their child grows and develops;
- *Milestone Moments* booklet, featuring milestones from two months to age five in the areas of language/communication, learning/thinking, social/emotional, and movement/physical development. The booklet includes parent tips to help boost your child's development, as well as signs of delays that will support parents and providers to Act Early to ensure developmental concerns are not delayed.

www.cdc.gov/actearly (Click on "Free Materials," click "Learn the Signs. Act Early," click "Order Form," click on "Program- scroll down to Child Development – Learn the Signs. Act Early, click "Materials" – scroll down to Books (Amazing Me) or Booklets (Milestone Moments) and place your order.

If you do not have internet access contact SD Parent Connection at 800-640-4553 for printed copies or for assistance ordering books/booklets.

Early Learning and Literacy

Parents are first teachers and role models for their children. Children with and without disabilities need to be engaged in early literacy learning. Literacy involves much more than being able to read and write. A broad definition of literacy includes competence, knowledge and skills in a variety of areas. Literacy involves critical and effective use of language (spoken and written) and the ability to recognize and understand ideas shared through things we see, hear and participate in.



Important for All Children

Children with cognitive impairments should engage in the same beginning literacy activities as children without disabilities. The activities should be interactive, constructive and meaning-based. Examples include listening repeatedly to stories, having access to writing/coloring tools, playing games. The routines, activities and settings a child experiences day in and day out matter a great deal in terms of a child's learning and development. The real life settings and activities provide the basis for children to learn meaningful and culturally relevant behavior.

Sources of Everyday Child Learning are Family and Community Life

Family life includes those routines, rituals and celebrations important to the family. Talking to your child during routines such as dressing and undressing, explaining family celebrations, telling stories, playing with your child are all opportunities to make a positive impact on your child's development and learning.

Community life includes family outings, recreation activities, church and religious activities, playing at the park/playground, cultural activities such as powwows. These all provide opportunities to expand your child's vocabulary, learn about sharing with others, and learn about a cultural or community event.

Everyday Activities are Child Learning Opportunities

Everyday child learning opportunities include: daily routines such as meal times, going to bed; celebrations such as birthdays or holidays; and places such as child care, doctor's office, or relative's homes. Every child in every family in every culture in every place on earth participates in activity settings day-in and day-out. The particular activity settings that children experience, however, differ based on where children live, parents' beliefs and values, cultural norms, and many other factors.

What Parents Can Do...

Identify your child's personal interests — what are the likes or choices that influence your child's activities, events or behavior? Is it the people, foods or activities your child enjoys? Is it the feel of a particular blanket or toy?

Identify your child's situational interests — what draws your child's attention to participate in an activity? Is it a particular toy or game, or event that interests your child?

Based on your observations:

- Select activities that provide the best opportunities for your child's interest-based learning.
- Increase your child's participation in everyday learning opportunities. Use bedtime for reading stories, or bath time to talk about hot and cold or what happens when we splash.
- Use different ways of interacting with your child to support and encourage competence such as singing, talking, playing.
- Think about what is working for you and your child in everyday learning activities. Do more of the everyday activities your child seems to enjoy. Try new activities to help your child expand vocabulary and competence.

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Help for Parents

Many resources, online and printed, are available to assist parents in increasing their child's literacy-learning power. Early literacy learning pays off and prepares your child for preschool/school and beyond. The Center for Early Literacy Learning (www.earlyliteracylearning.org) has a section for parents with a variety of activities that parents can incorporate into daily living activities for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. South Dakota Birth to Three Connections (<http://doe.sd.gov/oess/Birthto3.aspx>) has a section for families with developmental milestones and things parents can do with their child. You can find the **SD Early Learning Guidelines Parent Guide** at South Dakota Head Start Collaboration (<http://doe.sd.gov/oess/headstart.aspx>). The guide has a wealth of information and activities that parents can do as part of everyday routines.



Early learning is a part of everything we do with our children. At a recent training, one young mother said it well, "Just talk to your child. Tell him about shapes, colors and encourage him to touch and feel." Nothing fancy or costly but can make a world of difference for your child's development.



South Dakota Birth to Three Program

South Dakota's Birth to Three Program provides early intervention services, at no cost, throughout South Dakota for children from birth to age three, who have a disability or a developmental delay. Services include: audiology, assistive technology, family training and counseling and home visits, health services, medical services for evaluation, nursing, nutrition, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychological services, social work services, service coordination, special instruction, speech and language, transportation, and vision.

The Birth to Three program is administered through the South Dakota Department of Education. Birth to Three conducts a screening, a quick look at how a child is learning and growing. Different kinds of tests and questions will be used to learn how to best help the child.

The areas which may be examined include:

- Development of your child's body (including sight and hearing)
- Thinking and language skills
- Self-help skills
- Emotional growth

The tests and questions will be given in the language you and your family use at home. The results of the screening will be seen by you, the person doing the screening and the Birth to Three Service Coordinator. The results will be discussed within five days of the time the screening is completed.

After you receive the results from the training, the following decisions may be made:

- your child's development is fine at this point
- another screening will be scheduled in several months
- a referral to other helpful sources will be made
- your child's development should be looked at more closely (referral for evaluation)

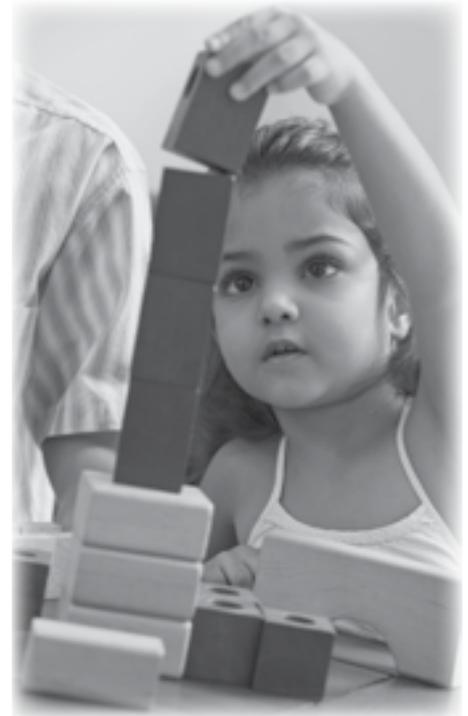
If further evaluation determines your child qualifies for services, a Service Coordinator will be assigned to work with your family. To learn more about South Dakota's Birth to Three program, call 800-305-3064 or visit www.doe.sd.gov/oess/Birthto3.aspx.

Special Education and Related Services for Children Ages Three to Five

Local public school districts where children and their families live have the responsibility to screen, evaluate and provide individualized help to eligible children with disabilities and significant delays without cost to families. Children are identified as needing special education and related services through

- referrals by parents or professionals because of questions or concerns about a child's development,
- referrals by Birth to Three programs for children receiving services who will be turning three, and
- local school Child Find offices or events, where children are screened to determine if there is an underlying problem or delay that might need further evaluation. Such screenings cover a range of skill areas—vision and hearing, gross and fine motor skills, speech and language use, social and emotional behavior, and more.

Families can contact their local school to register for a Child Find screening. Parents may also request an evaluation, in writing is best. An evaluation must assess all areas of the child's development and parent consent is required. Evaluation results will be used to determine eligibility for special education and related services, and to make decisions about an individualized educational program (IEP) for the child. Parents have the right to disagree with evaluation findings and/or determination of eligibility. SD Parent Connection has resources available to help families understand the special education process, their rights as parents, and the rights of their children to receive needed supports.



**Contact SD Parent Connection 24/7
at www.sdparent.org or m.sdparent.org
www.facebook.com/sdparentconnection**

Call Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (central time)
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