

# Early Childhood Beginnings Birth to 3 years



Parents are a child's first and most important teacher. There are many things a parent can do, starting at birth, to help their child. They can support learning during daily activities, such as feeding, bathing, grocery shopping, and playing! Parents can also partner with their child's teachers, caregivers, pediatrician, and other service providers to help their child be successful.



## Did you know...

- During the first three years of life, the brain grows at an amazing rate (to 80 percent of its adult size) and forms "connections." By the time a child is three, the brain has formed about 1,000 trillion connections, about twice as many as adults have. These connections are critical to a child's healthy growth and development.
- Neuroscientific research indicates that early experiences, both good and bad, have a great effect on the brain's development and ability to form and maintain these critical connections. Researchers confirm that the way parents and caregivers interact with and provide experiences for young children have a big impact on the child's emotional development, learning abilities, and ultimately, success in school and later in life.
- Research shows that what a child experiences in the first years of life profoundly influences how his brain will develop and how he will interact with the world throughout his life.
- Often parents don't know about the many little things they can do to foster their children's healthy cognitive and emotional development, like talking to the children beginning in infancy, reading to them from a very early age, and helping them play simple games.
- Researchers found that when mothers frequently spoke to their infants, their children learned almost 300 more words by age 2 than did their peers whose mothers rarely spoke with them. Furthermore, studies have suggested that mere exposure to language such as listening to the television or to adults talking amongst themselves provides little benefit.
- Good nutrition is one of the best ways we know to aid in healthy brain development.
- It is important to recognize that what is most important to later reading success is providing a language-rich environment for children. Reading is one way, but there are many other ways as well, such as talking, singing, storytelling and listening to music.
- For children whose primary language is not English, it is very important for them to continue learning in their native language while also being exposed to English.
- There are a number of studies that show that when children hear a good deal of "live" language, when they are spoken to often and encouraged to communicate, they are more proficient with language than children who have more limited language exposure. Limit screen time!

# Birth to 3 Years – Supporting Your Child’s Development

INFANTS (Birth to 1 year)	TODDLERS (1 to 2 years)	TWOS (2 to 3 years)
<p>Respond with words to your infant’s sounds and movements. Repeat her sounds back to her. Talk to her about what you are doing, what she is experiencing, and what is happening around her. (I’m going to take your diaper off – it may feel cold.” “The fan is blowing air on us!”) Your infant is learning the pattern and rhythm of language.</p>	<p>Translate your toddler’s gestures into words, and her single words into sentences. (“Would you like more juice in your cup?”) Comment on whatever your child is doing, seeing and feeling. Toddlers are taking in new words all day long.</p>	<p>Ask your child questions that get him thinking. (“What do we need to wipe up this spill?”) Use words that help your child name and understand his feelings. Continue to introduce new vocabulary words. Your two-year-old is learning to use language for many purposes.</p>
<p>Sing lots of different songs to your infant. Sing lullabies. Make up simple songs about your infant or your daily activities. Sing a silly song as you tickle his tummy. Your love and attention helps your infant to focus and listen.</p>	<p>Dance, jump, clap and tap to the beat of music with your child! Your child is learning to coordinate his movements. He also learns by observing and imitating you.</p>	<p>Sing and chant short ABC and number songs. Sing simple rhyming songs. Sing songs about moving different body parts. (“Put your arms up in the air, in the air!”) Two-year-olds love to learn through music.</p>
<p>Provide infant toys that squeak, rattle or light up. Also good: simple household containers to put something in and dump it out; containers with lids the infant can take off and try to put back on; safe materials with different textures, like squashy, bumpy, slippery. Your infant is learning about the world around her.</p>	<p>Encourage your child to explore toys in different ways – touching, banging, stacking. Play simple turn-taking games, like peek-a-boo and hide the teddy bear. Sand and water are fun safe materials for a toddler to explore, especially outdoors where mess doesn’t matter! Your toddler is learning cause and effect — what makes things happen!</p>	<p>Play simple pretend games with your two-year old, like baby dolls, tea party or stuffed animals. Help your child build a road with blocks or do a puzzle. Provide materials that your child can use to create or explore, like crayons, play dough or finger paint. Allow your two-year-old to help you with simple household tasks. They love to try to sweep, rake or wash things. Your child’s imagination and self-help skills are growing.</p>
<p>As soon as your infant can sit by himself, share books with him. Choose mostly sturdy books that can be wiped clean, but include some touch and feel books. Point to the pictures with your child. Make animal noises when you share animal books! Your child is learning more language, and learning to love books.</p>	<p>Choose books with big pictures about things that interest your child – bugs, animals, people and machines are a few possibilities. Talk about the pictures. Ask simple questions. (“Where is the caterpillar?”) Your toddler is learning how to hold a book and how to look at it herself.</p>	<p>Your two-year-old is ready for story books with simple plots. She will enjoy stories with repeated words or phrases that she can say as you point to the words. Ask her about what happened in the story. (“What did the doggie do then? Where did he hide?”) Encourage your child to choose the book for bedtime, or to “read” the story to you. Be prepared to read her favorite book many times! Your child is learning how books and print work.</p>

# Resources and Activity Ideas for Early Learning and School Readiness

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## **American Academy of Pediatrics**

Shares specific information about the growth and development of children ages 3–5. There are also links to topics such as safety, immunizations, nutrition, fitness, and emotional wellness. Numerous articles about varying topics are available, as well.

[www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx)

## **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**

Provides suggested activities to encourage speech and language development for children, ages 2–4 years and 4–6 years. It also contains information about typical development patterns, learning more than one language, etc.

[www.asha.org/public/speech/development/Parent-Stim-Activities.htm](http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/Parent-Stim-Activities.htm)

## **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)**

Offers helpful tips about supporting your child's social/emotional development, including relationship building, confidence, communication, persistence, self-control, etc.

[csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html)

## **CDC Family Portal**

Shares guidance on handling common parenting challenges (for children of all ages) through interactive activities, videos, and more.

[www.cdc.gov/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/parents)

## **Healthy Beginnings**

Helps you to nurture your child's potential for learning and growth by offering knowledge and support. Specifically designed for parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers. Especially useful is the Activity Planner which offers fun, developmentally appropriate activities that build young children's skills and promotes different kinds of learning for specific age ranges

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

## **Howard County Library (HCL)**

Includes books, developmental toys, CDs, DVDs, and audiobooks for children, as well as books and other resources for parents and caregivers. HCL offers an array of classes for preschoolers that teach creative expression, social skills, listening comprehension, and the foundations of reading through letter and number recognition and vocabulary building. Catalog and complete listing of classes are available online.

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

## **Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) Early Childhood Programs**

Offers many resources for families of young children, including helpful tips for promoting school readiness for children. There are resources available to assist you and your child with the transition to kindergarten, including a videotaped session of a parent workshop. You can also preview the curriculum and learn about registration procedures.

[www.hcpss.org/enroll/kindergarten](http://www.hcpss.org/enroll/kindergarten)

## **Launch Into Learning**

Brings together numerous programs and agencies (through the Howard County Early Childhood Advisory Council) to support young children and their families. Find lots of local resources gathered here.

[www.howardcountymd.gov/launchintolearning](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/launchintolearning)

## **Maryland State Department of Education: Division of Early Childhood Development**

Includes a wide range of information, such as how to find quality child care programs and resources to support early learning standards.

[earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org](http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org)

## **Ready At Five**

Helps you to see how involvement is key to your child's future success. There are many things you can do with your child to help build skills, knowledge, and abilities in many different areas. Especially helpful are the "Activities and the Parent Tips" that can be found on this site.

[www.readyatfive.org/raf/for-parents/parents-matter.html](http://www.readyatfive.org/raf/for-parents/parents-matter.html)

## **Vroom**

Shows you that daily activities can be fun for both you and your child. Find out how these activities support brain development. Download the mobile application for easy access.

## **Zero to Three**

Promotes health and development for infants and toddlers and their families. Includes a Baby Brain Map (an interactive way to learn about a baby's brain development) and plenty of free parenting resources to browse. You can also sign up for a free e-newsletter that showcases how children learn and grow each month from birth to three years old.

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

# What If I Have Concerns About My Child's Development?

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## Here are some practical suggestions to follow:

- Schedule and maintain regular visits with your child's health provider (e.g., pediatrician, nurse practitioner, family practice physician, Health Department staff). Discuss your concerns with them.
- Speak with your child's child care provider about your concerns and their observations. These individuals work with young children on a daily basis and have an understanding of child development. If they have concerns, it is important to follow up on their concerns, as well.

## If you still have concerns:

- Check a developmental checklist such as: [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones), or [www.easterseals.com/mtffc](http://www.easterseals.com/mtffc).

## If you continue to have concerns...

- Contact the Child Find Program at 410-313-7046. Find information at [www.hcpss.org/special-education/identification-assessment-and-evaluation](http://www.hcpss.org/special-education/identification-assessment-and-evaluation).
- Contact the CARE Center at 410-313-CARE (2273). Find information at [www.howardcountymd.gov/carecenter](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/carecenter).

## Educational Opportunities

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- Half-day (and some full-day) prekindergarten services are available to children who are 4 years old by September 1 and who meet certain eligibility criteria. Information may be found at [www.hcpss.org/schools/prek](http://www.hcpss.org/schools/prek).
- Children must be 5 years old by September 1 to attend kindergarten. Kindergarten is a mandatory grade. Processes are in place for families who want an exception to this mandate (i.e., kindergarten waiver or early admission). Information is available at [www.hcpss.org/schools/enroll](http://www.hcpss.org/schools/enroll).
- International families may receive assistance or have questions answered at the Office of International Student Services at 410-313-1525 and/or 410-313-7102.
- There are many high-quality, community-based programs serving Howard County families, including child care centers, nursery schools, family child care providers, etc. For more information, contact the CARE line at 410-313-CARE (2273) or email [children@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:children@howardcountymd.gov).
- The Howard County Library System offers many educational services and social opportunities for young children. Visit [www.hclibrary.org](http://www.hclibrary.org) for details.



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