

# kid basics

Tips, tricks and answers to help you care for your young child



# Well Child Visits

Every child needs to visit the doctor often during the first few years of life. The doctor will make sure your child is healthy and developing normally and will give immunizations. Below are some tips to help make the most of the visits.

**Scheduling the Visit:** Typically, well visits occur at:

2 – 4 days	2 months	4 months	6 months	9 months
12 months	15 months	18 months	24 months	36 months

Try to make your appointments as early as possible, before the most convenient time slots fill up.

**Preparing for the Visit:** During your visit, the doctor may ask you about your child's behavior and development. So, before each visit, you and/or your child's caregivers should pay attention to:

- **Sleep habits:** How is your child sleeping during the day and at night, and for how long?
- **Bowel movements:** How many does he have per day?
- **Feeding:** What is she eating and how often?
- **Physical development:** Is he rolling, sitting, crawling, standing, walking?
- **Language development:** What sounds does she make or what words does she say?
- **Social-emotional development:** Does he smile, laugh and respond to you? Does he play with you, by himself or with others?
- **Red flags:** Is there anything that concerns you about your child or her development?

**The Day of the Visit:** To make doctor's visits easier, bring with you:

- a favorite book, toy or stuffed animal
- a snack or drink
- extra diapers and wipes
- a blanket
- a list of questions you have for the doctor
- your child's immunization card

*Born Learning<sup>SM</sup>* is a public engagement campaign that provides important information about what young children need every day to ensure quality early learning. Designed to support you in your critical role as a child's first teacher, Born Learning materials are made available through the efforts of United Way, United Way Success By 6 and Civitas.

For more information, visit us online at [www.bornlearning.org](http://www.bornlearning.org).

# Your Child

You can make sure you give your child the best possible start in life just by following these simple guidelines:

Take care of yourself.

Provide a warm and loving environment.

Talk, sing and read with your child.

Create a predictable world for your child.

Understand and respond to your child's needs.



**Infants** need love and attention to learn to trust. Talk and sing to your baby while diapering, feeding or rocking him and help him learn about his environment by giving him things to touch, taste, smell, hear and see.



**Young toddlers** are beginning to explore the world on their own and act independently, so provide time and safe space to dance, read board books and work on feeding and dressing.

**Older toddlers** like to observe and imitate. Count objects, play matching games, color, paint and do dramatic play. Provide choices and set limits to help toddlers with impulse control.



## Simple steps to connect with your child:

### **Take care of yourself so you can care for your child.**

Becoming a parent can be overwhelming. Unless you take care of yourself, it will be hard to take good care of your child. Don't be afraid to ask for help caring for your child.

**Provide a warm and loving environment.** Helping your child feel safe is the key to encouraging her healthy growth and development. Make sure you give her a lot of affection.

**Talk, sing and read with your child.** The young child is especially interested in sounds—the building blocks of speech and language. You can form a deep emotional connection with your child just by talking to him.

**Create a predictable world for your child.** Providing routines teaches your child that you and the world around her are trustworthy. If your child understands this, she will spend less energy fussing over her needs and more time learning.

**Understand and respond to your child's needs.** This will reduce stress and help your baby learn to soothe himself. Responding to your child also teaches him that you care and that he can trust you to read his signals.

# How to...

These “how-to’s” can provide some comfort to your child and make being a parent a little easier.

## ...help your child learn

Your child is born learning. You are your child’s first and best teacher, and can help his developing brain by:

- talking, singing and reading as often as possible, even to newborns
- exposing him to your everyday activities
- making special trips to a park, museum or library
- encouraging healthy play and playing with him

## ...comfort your child

Comforting your child may not always be easy. Until you figure out what works to calm her, try one solution at a time for 5 to 10 minutes. For example:

- walking or swaying
- singing, humming or cooing
- holding or massaging
- playing with a mobile
- reading a book
- providing a favorite toy or stuffed animal

## ...establish regular routines

Everyday activities like feeding, sleeping and bathing are perfect for starting routines. A bedtime routine might include changing a diaper, changing into pajamas and any of the following:

- singing a song
- playing with a mobile
- reading a book
- hugging goodnight

## ...bond with your child

Give a child a lot of love and affection by:

- making eye contact—about 8 to 12 inches away from you
- holding him close—carrying, hugging or sitting in your lap
- using gentle motion—rocking in your arms, bouncing in your lap or tickling

# Child Care

Your child needs high-quality child care. Here are some signs of a good child care setting:

Small groups of children

Consistent caregivers

Caregivers who are open to learning

Open-door policy

Clean, safe environment

Choosing the right child care is important. And there are many choices, including:

**Stay-at-home parent:** The mother or father cares for the child at home.

**Relative care:** A relative, neighbor or friend takes care of a child in the caregiver's home or in the child's home.

**Nanny:** Care for children in the child's home by someone other than a family member.

**Licensed family child care:** Care for unrelated children in a caregiver's home.

**Licensed child care center:** Care for children in groups in an organized facility.



**Quality matters the most when deciding on any type of child care program.** Look for the following:

**Small groups of children.** Make sure your child gets some one-on-one attention every day. Caregiver to child ratios may vary by state according to local laws.

**Consistent caregivers.** Nurturing relationships with trusted adults that are developed over time are the building blocks of early learning.

**Caregivers who are open to learning.** Caregivers should be eager to learn about child development and share their learning with you.

**Open-door policy.** Settings that welcome parents' visits and involvement build trusting, open relationships between home and child care.

**Clean, safe environment.** Your child must be safe. If you spot dirty or dangerous toys and equipment in a child care environment, think twice.

For more information, visit Child Care Aware on the web at [www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org) or call 1-800-424-2246.

# Child Care Checklist

It is most important to find caregivers who make you feel comfortable, are trustworthy and provide quality care. Use this checklist as a guide.

## APPROACH

- Treats children with respect
- Gets on the children's level when speaking to them
- Accepts children's feelings and differences
- Encourages exploration while setting appropriate limits
- Provides every child with his or her own place for sleeping and storing belongings
- Sets appropriate limits
- Helps children learn how to interact with each other
- Helps children learn how to take care of themselves
- Incorporates families through regular communication and involvement in the program

## SAFETY

- Keeps all equipment in good condition
- Keeps dangerous things out of reach: cleaning supplies, sharp objects, medications, etc.
- Provides a clean and comfortable environment
- Encourages and models good hygiene — hand-washing, etc.
- Provides age-appropriate and culturally relevant activities and toys

## BACKGROUND

- Has training in child development, first aid and CPR
- Has experience caring for young children
- Understands and respects different parenting styles
- Has had a criminal background check
- Has a valid and current license, if applicable

# Sleep

Sleep periods develop as the brain matures. Day or night, the best times to soothe a child to sleep are during times of drowsiness.

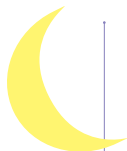
**Babies usually begin to sleep for longer stretches at night at about six weeks.** Darkness and quiet adult behaviors serve as cues to sleep.

**Infants usually begin to sleep for longer periods during the day between three and four months.** For naps, set aside quiet time and reduce outside stimulation.

## When should my child sleep?

**1 to 6 weeks**  
Enormous variation  
Scattered sleep

**6 weeks to 3 months**  
Naps scattered  
Bedtime: 6 to 10 pm



**3 to 8 months**  
Two or three naps  
Bedtime: 6 to 8 pm

**8 to 12 months**  
Two naps  
Bedtime: 6 to 8 pm



**12 to 21 months**  
One or two naps  
Bedtime: 6 to 8 pm

**21 to 36 months**  
One nap  
Bedtime: 6 to 8 pm



## Good sleeptime practices will help your child be happier.

**Look for signs your child is ready to go to sleep.** Start getting a child ready for bed when she first shows signs of becoming tired, such as yawning or rubbing her eyes.

**Establish a consistent sleeptime routine.** Regularly doing the same series of activities before going to bed helps a child understand that it is time to go to sleep.

**Eliminate motion.** While the motion of a swing or moving stroller might soothe and temporarily quiet a child, it may keep her from falling into a deep sleep.

**Adjust your schedule according to your child's need for sleep.** You may need to make changes to his sleep and activity schedule if, for example, your child woke up early, went to bed late or is ready to eliminate a nap.

**Sleep when your baby sleeps.** Parents need rest too.

**Always place your baby on his back to sleep.**

More information about sleep can be found in the book *Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child* by Marc Weissbluth, M.D. and *Sleeping through the Night* by Jodi Mindell, PhD.

Adapted from the book *Understanding Children* by Richard Saul Wurman and Civitas, ©2002. All rights reserved.

# Use a Soothing Routine

A consistent, soothing routine makes getting to sleep easier. Pick those that make you and your child comfortable, and do them regularly. Here are some ideas:

## 1. Make bathtime a routine.

A calming, warm bath is a good way to relax your young child. You also can use bathtime to prepare your child for bed by brushing his teeth and putting on his pajamas.

## 2. Have a quiet chat.

As you tuck your child into bed, talk to her about her day, your day and things for her to look forward to in the morning.

## 3. Read bedtime stories.

Reading to a child is a great pastime. Let your child choose a book and then read it aloud to him.

## 4. Sing a lullaby.

Singing the same song to your child each night can be a wonderful way to soothe her to sleep. Follow it up with a tape of familiar bedtime songs.

## 5. Say goodnight.

Once your child is ready for bed, say something like “Goodnight, sleep well, see you in the morning.” Don’t forget to tell him you love him.



# Play

You play a valuable role in your child's playtime. Here are some ideas for getting involved:

- Jump right in.
- Forget the rules.
- Think like a child.
- Let a child guide his play.
- Take a break.
- Participate enthusiastically.
- Watch out for overstimulation.

Play is a child's work, with benefits far beyond the obvious one: fun!

## Social Benefits of Play

- helps a child form meaningful relationships
- teaches communication, negotiation, cooperation and compromise
- helps a child experience trust, friendship and love

## Emotional Benefits of Play

- helps a child express feelings, develop empathy and cope with difficult situations
- helps a child deal with emotions and regain a sense of control
- helps adults understand a child's feelings

## Intellectual Benefits of Play

- provides ideas and problem-solving techniques
- fosters curiosity, creativity and intellect
- prepares a child for school
- helps a child make sense of her world and function successfully in it



## Get the most out of playtime!

**Jump right in.** Playing together right from the start helps build the foundation for trusting relationships and helps him become a happy person.

**Forget the rules.** Encouraging exploration, creative play and "make believe" enhances the development of imagination.

**Think like a child.** Creating imaginative games and new ways to use toys and safe household objects adds to the play experience.

**Let a child guide his play.** Allowing the child to pick the activity and decide how it's played gives him confidence.

**Take a break.** Playing alone gives a child time to process what she has been doing. Watch—if she is happy, leave her alone. If she seems bored, re-direct her activity.

**Participate enthusiastically.** Being involved in a child's play and taking it seriously encourages his imagination and self-esteem.

**Watch out for overstimulation.** Stop playing when your child has had enough—an infant will turn his head or start to fuss.

# Choosing Quality Toys

A rule of thumb: Less is more. The less a toy does, the more opportunity a child has to create and learn from it. Simple toys are easier for children to use, require less supervision and last longer.

## 1. SAFETY FIRST

Toys should match a child's developmental level and age. Toys should be clean and should not contain unsafe, toxic or flammable materials, sharp corners or small, detachable parts.

## 2. LONG-LASTING

To survive a child's repeated handling, a toy must be made of stable and solid materials.

*Be sure to keep potential choking hazards—any toy or object small enough to fit through a circle this size—out of children's reach. Use a toilet paper tube to check.*

## 3. EASY TO USE

A child must be able to work a toy by himself in order for him to enjoy it. Generally, simple toys are the easiest to operate.

## 4. ENTERTAINMENT VALUE

Ideally, a child should find a toy fun to play with now and as she grows. Look for toys that a child can play with in many ways.

## 5. EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Play teaches a child to think, create and imagine. Choose toys that allow for pretending, role-playing, problem-solving and practicing skills.

## 6. SOCIAL VALUE

Children learn important social skills, like cooperation, negotiation and compromise, by playing with other children. For older children who are more likely to share, choose toys that they can use with others. For younger children, have enough toys so that sharing is not necessary.

# Dads

Involved dads or other men are essential in a child's life. Here are a few ways for men to develop a positive relationship with a child:

- Define your role.
- Create unique rituals.
- Make time for both work and family.
- Be creative to overcome long distance.

**Dads and other important men make a unique contribution to each child's development.**



## WHEN FATHERS:

- Are affectionate
- Spend time with their children
- Are involved in children's daily activities
- Have a positive attitude



## THEIR CHILDREN:

- Are less likely to cry or worry
- Have fewer behavior problems
- Are more sociable
- Perform better in school

## To stay involved, dads can:

**Define your role.** Decide what kind of role model you want to be and how you will be involved in your child's life. The key is to be consistent, provide lots of hugs and talk with your child as much as possible.

**Create unique rituals.** Turn basic activities into special dad-and-child traditions, like taking a walk or eating breakfast together.

**Make time for both work and family.** Involvement is critical, but it is also important to find some personal time to refuel.

**Be creative to overcome long distance.** Dads who travel often or who live far away can use the phone, record a child's favorite bedtime story on tape, send email, letters, pictures and surprises. Also, plan special one-on-one time whenever possible.

# Make the Most of Fathertime

An active and involved father or important male can boost a child's self-esteem and contribute to his sense of confidence. Here are some ways to make the most of fathertime:

**Take responsibility for some everyday routines.** Determine the activities that you will manage, such as getting your child dressed, bathing her or reading a bedtime story.

**Read up.** Learn about parenting basics, such as ages and levels of development, what toys help a child learn and grow or how to soothe a crying baby.

**Read with your child.** Carve out a regular time slot when your child knows he can sit with you to read stories. Go to the library together to explore a variety of books.

**Create a "dad's morning."** Be in charge of all activities one morning each week. You, mom and your child will all look forward to this.

**Run errands together.** Determine which errands you can do with your child.

**Tackle sleep issues.** Take turns with mom handling issues that arise late at night. It's a great way to comfort and connect with your child.

**Spend time at home,** especially when caring for a baby. The first weeks of a baby's life are crucial for bonding as a family. So, save vacation time to use after the baby's birth.

**Communicate with the child's caregiver.** You can learn a lot about your child from her caregiver. Keep connected with simple questions: How much did my child eat? How long did she nap?

## Behavior

One of your most important jobs as a parent is to teach your child what the world expects of him. Here are a few steps to follow:

- Offer specific praise.
- Be a good role model.
- Ignore small incidents.
- Set clear expectations.
- Be positive.
- Be consistent.

When managing your child's behavior, always consider her developmental level.

**For infants:** Discipline is never appropriate. Infants do not have control of their actions and therefore cannot be held accountable for them.



**For crawlers, cruisers and new walkers:** Around the time a baby learns to crawl, he is beginning to explore limits. However, it may take a while for him to understand what those limits are.



**For toddlers (two years and older):** A toddler is starting to understand expectations and consequences.



By encouraging a child's good behavior, you will spend less time disciplining her.

**Offer specific praise.** Show you recognize your child's efforts by commenting specifically on his actions. For example, "You tried to find the right puzzle piece and you did it!"

**Be a good role model.** Children learn from example, so act the way you want your child to act.

**Ignore small incidents and accidents,** such as spilled milk. Just give a reminder to be careful next time and let the child help clean up.

**Set clear expectations.** Make sure your child understands the rules and enforce them consistently.

**Be positive.** Let children know what they should do, not what they shouldn't do. Rather than saying "Don't draw on the walls" suggest "Here is some paper you can draw on."

**Be consistent.** Lessons must be repeated over a period of days or weeks before they are learned. Only set rules you are willing and able to enforce every single time.

# Is your approach to managing your child's behavior in line with the experts?

**Infants:** Discipline at this age is never appropriate.

**Shower him with love and affection**—you can't spoil an infant.

**Respond to her needs.** When she cries, try to determine why. Is she hungry, wet, tired? Responding quickly to your baby builds the trusting relationship she needs to thrive.

**Be patient.**  
Discipline can be difficult for everyone. Take a deep breath or count to ten before you react to your child.

**Crawlers, Cruisers and New Walkers:** Begin to set limits by focusing on safety.

**Get ready to set limits.** Does your baby look to see if you are watching him? He is now looking to you to let him know what is okay and what is not.

**Introduce “no” only for safety issues**—if a child hears “no” too commonly, it will not have any meaning to her. Instead, use language that tells children what they can or should do.

**Stay one step ahead.** Distract or redirect a child from unsafe objects or activities and child-proof your home.

**Use non-verbal communication.** A stern look or a “thumbs up” can say a lot to your child.

Never use spanking or other physical punishment.

**Toddlers (two years and up):** Set clear rules and enforce them consistently.

**Avoid situations that are hard for your child.** Don't take your overtired child to the grocery store.

**Create consequences that relate to the behavior.** For example, if your child is acting out, remove him from the situation until he is able to calm down.

**Make consequences immediate.** If you threaten or leave the consequences until later, a child is less likely to understand what he needs to do next time.

# Feeding

Breast milk or formula should be your baby's main source of nutrition for the first year. Introduce solids between four and six months old.

Signs that your baby is ready for solid foods:

- Has control of head
- Can sit up with support
- Wants to breastfeed more than eight times during a 24-hour period
- Gets enough breast milk or formula but is still hungry after feedings
- Can take food from a spoon and swallow



0 to 6 months

## Liquid

Provide breast milk or formula.



4 to 6 months

## Smooth

Begin with rice cereal, then add single-ingredient foods.



6 to 8 months

## Mushy

Expand and combine the flavors of soft, pureed food.



8 to 15 months

## Soft

Offer easily digested foods that your baby can pick up by herself.



15 months and up

## Small Pieces

Serve most table foods.

## Is your baby ready for “real” food?

Check with your child's doctor, then follow these guidelines:

**Begin with rice cereal.** Mix plain infant rice cereal with breast milk or formula.

**Serve one meal a day** until eating abilities improve.

**Don't feed cereal or other foods through a bottle.**

After your baby has adjusted to cereal, add **pureed fruits and vegetables**. Introduce new single-ingredient foods one at a time to identify food allergies.

**Make sure your baby sits up when he eats** to prevent choking. A highchair is always recommended.

If your baby is very hungry, **start his meal with a little breast milk or formula.**

**Feed your baby directly from the jar only if you're going to use it all at once.** This prevents bacteria growth in the jars.

Put down the spoon and **try again later if your baby cries** or turns away.

**Try re-introducing foods in a few days** if your baby does not like a flavor.

# Meal Ideas for Children Six Months and Up

Use these simple suggestions to introduce new foods, boost your child's appetite and encourage a balanced diet.

Eating habits will vary from child to child. These tips are general guidelines. You should ask your child's doctor any specific questions.

## 6 to 8 months

**Introduction of proteins:** pureed meats, cottage cheese, yogurt or mild cheese

**Combinations of flavors:** apples with sweet potatoes or pureed chicken with rice

**Two or three meals a day** in addition to breast milk or formula

**Tip:** Don't offer foods that could cause choking, such as whole grapes, popcorn or uncooked carrots.

## 8 to 15 months

**Finger foods:** soft cheeses, noodles, waffles or steamed vegetables

**Bite-size pieces** that are big enough to pick up yet small enough to swallow, like Cheerios

**Soft pieces** that a baby can "gum," like banana slices

**Tip:** Avoid foods that may cause allergic reactions, such as peanut butter, egg whites, honey, nuts, fish, strawberries, wheat and orange juice. Talk with your doctor about when it is best to offer these foods.

## 15 months and up

**Manageable pieces:** sandwiches, pizzas or hamburgers in miniature sizes

**Creative presentation:** multi-colored pasta or fresh fruit in Jell-O cubes

**Healthy snacks to refuel:** apple slices, steamed carrots, or rice cakes with cheese

**Multiple small meals a day**



# Early Literacy

Words, sounds, storybooks, songs and nursery rhymes: these are the building blocks of literacy.

You can give your child a head start by beginning now.

Read or tell stories together every day.

Teach new words.

Sing songs and nursery rhymes.

Ask questions.

Use play to introduce language.

	Reading	Listening and Talking	Singing	Writing
<b>Babies...</b> 	...like to look at pictures of familiar things, listen to short stories and touch the pages.	...learn by listening to you talk. They imitate you by moving their mouths and making sounds.	...enjoy listening to your voice as well as the calming rhythms and playful beats of music.	...start their writing skills by grasping at objects.
<b>Toddlers/ Pre-schoolers...</b> 	...can sit and listen to a story, turn pages and talk about pictures.	...share their thoughts and can have a conversation.	...have favorite songs and like to sing along with you.	...learn by scribbling, drawing and pretending to write.

## Help your child explore language and learning by following these simple steps:

### Read or tell stories together every day, starting at birth.

Read from a book, simply talk about the pictures or make up stories based on what you see. When you read together, you help your child learn to love books—and you!

**Teach new words anytime you can.** Talk to your child about what you see around you and what you are doing. The more you speak, the more you build your child's vocabulary.

**Sing songs and nursery rhymes over and over again.** Add songs and rhymes into all of your routines, sing “Rock-a-Bye Baby” at bedtime, “Rub-a-Dub-Dub” at bathtime.

**Ask questions and watch for their responses.** From day one, ask your child *where* and *what* whenever you can—at the store, on a walk, while looking at pictures or reading stories. Ask questions about the past, present and future.

**Use play to introduce language.** Give your child books, musical instruments and other toys. When you interact with your child in a playful way, you introduce new words, sounds and concepts.

# Tips to Boost Your Child's Language Development

These ideas offer ways to build your child's literacy skills, preparing her for success in school and beyond.

## Reading

### Babies

- Provide your child picture books with simple objects or faces.
- Give him board or cloth books with pages that turn easily and won't tear.
- Offer him books with soft, rough or bumpy textures to touch and feel.

### Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Have your child point to familiar objects — numbers, colors, letters.
- Ask your child to tell stories about the pictures.
- Choose books about topics of interest like animals or trains — and big events like toilet training or the birth of a new sibling.

## Talking and Listening

### Babies

- Talk to your child about what you see and what you are doing.
- Listen as she communicates with coos, smiles, laughs and cries.

### Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Have conversations where you take turns talking and listening.
- Talk about the events of yesterday, today and tomorrow.
- Play hide-and-seek, talking about what you see as you look. Your child will listen closely while she hides.

## Singing

### Babies

- Play music and watch as your child bounces and babbles to the beat.
- Sing favorite songs over and over again.

### Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Teach your child songs that have hand movements.
- Teach him simple sing-along songs like *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*.

## Writing

### Babies

- Encourage your child to hold soft toys or rattles, which help develop grasping skills.
- Play with puzzles that have oversized numbers and letters.

### Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Let your child play with and trace magnetic or foam letters and numbers.
- Allow her to draw freely and creatively.



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