

Incredible Infants

What should we be helping children learn before kindergarten? This handout gives some information about your child's development and learning, based on the *North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development*. We include ideas for things you can do with your child—in your daily routines of family life—that will help support your child. You can change them to fit your family's needs. If you have questions about your child's development or learning, you can speak with your child's teacher or doctor.

Approaches to Learning

Babies are learning about the world. They show interest in their bodies and in brightly colored objects. Babies use their senses to learn—they look, watch, taste, touch and smell.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Expose your baby to new sights and sounds.
- Take walks outside.
- Hang colorful toys from her stroller.
- Move her to different places around the house.

Emotional and Social Development

Babies are learning about themselves and others. They recognize family members and like to watch them. Babies repeat actions to get the same effect—they smile and coo to get a family member's attention. Babies prefer to be held by adults they feel most safe with—and sometimes cry when separated from those special adults.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Help your baby learn that family members are there to support him and keep him safe.
- Use a calm, positive voice with your baby.
- Reassure him when he is upset. He will begin to learn to comfort himself, but right now he needs you to help him. By holding and comforting with words or music, you let your baby know that he is safe—that he can rely on you to help him, even if you may not know exactly what he needs.

Health and Physical Development

Babies are growing and developing very quickly. Over time, they sleep less during the day and more at night. Babies practice body movements by kicking and moving their arms, reaching to get toys, and learning to sit up. They learn to pick up and explore objects by shaking them, throwing them, and putting them in their mouth.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Try nap and evening sleep time routines—you can start with a warm bath, soft music, and a quiet storybook.
- Before your baby can roll on her own, it is safest to put her on her back. But you can play a game called “Tummy Time” when you are playing with her: Put your baby on her tummy on a hard surface (like a kitchen floor) no pillows or blanket. And lie on the floor in front of your baby with a favorite toy or just play “peek-a-boo.” This exercise, in just a few minutes a day, helps your baby develop a strong body that will be ready to crawl and walk later.

Language Development and Communication

Babies are learning to communicate. They turn when they hear sounds, especially the voices of favorite people. They use hand signals (reaching to be picked up) and sounds (crying, cooing) to get attention and communicate their needs. Babies pay attention to short picture books, and like to look at photographs, especially of family members.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Talk to your baby—all the time. Talk about what you are doing, where you are going, and what clothes you are putting on her. The more words babies hear, the more words they will use.
- Try to read short picture books every day. You can read the words on the page—or make some up. You can talk about the pictures, and ask questions (that you answer). This helps infants learn that books are about stories—and most importantly—that books are fun!
- Whatever your home language, continue to use it at home and in your community. Learning two languages is good for a child’s brain development.

Cognitive Development

Babies use their senses to learn about the world around them. They show wonder and fascination with new objects, events, or people. Babies search for objects and people that were present—and then are not. Babies stare longer at things that are new, or things they like.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Play peek-a-boo with your baby. Cover your face with your hands or a small towel, and uncover, saying “Peek-a-boo” or some other phrase that is special for you. Change the game as your baby gets older—allow him to take your hands or towel from your face to get the fun result (Peek!)
- Say, “Where’s Papa?” and pull your hands away and say, “Here he is!”

Wonderful Ones

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Approaches to Learning

Young toddlers are curious. When they kick a ball, push a button, or bang a drum, they learn by doing and creating an effect. Toddlers often repeat activities over and over to create the same effect.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Encourage your child to try new actions to make things happen, and describe his actions and effects using words. Describe your actions and effects. "Look, I'm turning the light off, and then on. You can do it, too."
- You can teach your child your family routines, and develop some especially for your toddler—like washing hands before eating and wearing a seatbelt/car seat in the car.

Emotional and Social Development

Toddlers are learning about themselves and others. They like to explore on their own, but may often check-in to make sure that a family member is near. Toddlers may get sad or angry when things are difficult.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Watch your toddler as she explores. Let her see that you are close by, and talk about what she is doing. "I see you are trying to open that box. I wonder what is inside."
- You can begin to teach your child how to handle problems. Tell her that you understand how she feels, and ask if she would like help. For example, "I see you are mad that you cannot get that block to stay on top. I sometimes get mad too. What happens if we turn the block this way? Look, you did it! I'm glad you tried again."

Health and Physical Development

Toddlers are growing and developing very quickly. They eat more table food, and can feed themselves when pieces are small. After learning to walk, they begin to climb and explore, and fall often. Most toddlers still need more than 10 hours of sleep per day.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Try to offer a variety of healthy foods to your toddler, and avoid snack foods that are very sweet or salty. Encourage your child to try all the healthy foods, but do not worry if your child chooses some foods and not others.
- Encourage your child to try new challenges, such as climbing steps and running. You may need to help your child if he seems unsteady.
- Develop sleep time routines—you can start with a warm bath, soft music, and a quiet storybook.

Language Development and Communication

Toddlers are learning to listen and talk. They use a few words, and sometimes just a sound, to stand for a word, for example, “B” sound to mean, ball, bath, and banana. They listen to short books, point to pictures, and turn the pages. Toddlers understand and follow simple directions.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Talk to your toddler. Tell her about what you are doing and where you are going. Tell your toddler the name for things and actions. “That is a plane.” “This is a banana. Would you like a banana?”
- Try to read short picture books every day. You can read the words on the page—or make some up. You can talk about the pictures, and ask questions (that you answer). For example, “This is a cow, and it makes a sound like this, ‘Mooooo.’”
- When you tell your child to do something, use just a few words and wait a few seconds for her to do what you said. Repeat, if needed, and then show her what you need her to do. Praise her when she follows a direction. For example, “Time for a clean diaper. Come here. Good listening.”
- Whatever your home language, continue to use it at home and in your community. Learning two languages is good for a child’s brain development.

Cognitive Development

Toddlers use their senses to learn about the world. They watch and copy behaviors that they see. They might pick up keys and pretend to drive to the store, or hold a block up to their ear to pretend to talk on the phone. They experiment with making things happen, such as throwing a towel up and watching it fall, and filling a bowl with toys and dumping them out. Toddlers can tell the difference between more and less, and begin to group things, such as balls and cars.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Encourage pretend play. Talk about what your child is doing and suggest new ideas . “It looks like you are going to the store. Would you like to drive?” Give lots of opportunities to experiment, and talk about what is happening. “I see you putting spoons in the pot, and then dumping them. Oh, you did it again!”
- Use words to describe “how many” or “how much.” “I think you have more cars than trucks—let’s look.”
- You can teach your child to clean up toys and books at home. “Books go in this basket, and your cars go in this box.” You can pick up along with him, and praise his sorting.

Terrific Twos

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Approaches to Learning

Toddlers observe and imitate, and learn through play. They pretend to cook dinner or go to the store. Toddlers like to try to solve problems, saying, "Me do it."

Ways to Support Your Child

- Pretend with your child, talk and ask questions. "I'm going to the store, would you like to come with me? What should we buy?" Suggest things, and offer pretend choices. "I'm going to buy some fruit. Should we buy oranges or bananas?"
- Encourage your child to try new things, and take safe "risks", letting him know that you are there to help.
- Show your child how to handle problems and frustration in different ways. When something is difficult, you can say, "Oops, that didn't work, I'll have to try something else."

Emotional and Social Development

Toddlers learn to follow social rules and routines with reminders. They begin to understand that they need to behave differently in different situations. For example, they may whisper when someone is sleeping or hold a grown-up hand to be safe in some places.

Toddlers understand more about feelings. They use facial expressions and actions associated with different emotions. Toddlers begin to take more responsibility by feeding themselves with a spoon and fingers, and taking off clothing.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Encourage morning and bedtime routines, with simple steps, such as: "In the morning we get dressed, eat breakfast, and then brush our teeth before school."
- Tell your toddler what you expect, using simple language, and remind often. For example, "We whisper in the library/church" and whisper when you say it—as a model.
- Talk with your child about feelings—yours and theirs. Describe feelings of characters in books.
- Teach your toddler how to use a fork and a spoon. Break down dressing tasks into little steps. For example, "Put your toes in the sock first and then pull it over the heel."

Health and Physical Development

Toddlers move all the time, as they begin to run and jump and climb. They can follow sleep routines and fall asleep on their own. Toddlers become coordinated with their hands, and can do simple puzzles, turn pages of books, and try to draw.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Actively play with your child every day. You can walk to a store, do jumping jacks, or dance to music in your living room. Even in small spaces, you can find a way to move.
- Have a sleep time routine for your child, maybe something like, “First bath, then 2 books, then time to sleep.”
- Encourage your child to use her hands to do things in your home: open a jar, turn a doorknob, and peel a banana.

Language Development and Communication

Toddlers understand and use more words every day. They begin to talk more, asking and answering questions, using simple (2-3 word) sentences, and can have a back-and-forth conversation. They can also follow directions.

If learning two languages, toddlers may use some words in one language and some in the other. They listen to short story books and remember words and events from story. Toddlers may show an interest in “writing” making marks on the page.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Talk with your child all the time. Your child will not always be able to talk back, but may point or nod/shake his head to respond. Encourage your child to use actions (hands up for “up”), and words to show you what he wants or needs.
- When giving directions, use your child’s name to get her attention, and give the direction(s) slowly. Give a reminder, and praise her when she follows the direction. Start with one step directions, and then two steps: “Pick up your books and put them on the shelf.”
- Try to read to your child every day, and make it part of your family routine. Read favorite books over again—and watch how your child starts to learn the ideas and words in the book!
- Show your child how you use writing to make a list, remember a name, or write a note. Encourage your child to write with paper and a pencil or crayon.
- Whatever your home language, continue to use it at home and in your community. Learning two languages is good for a child’s brain development.

Cognitive Development

Toddlers observe and can describe things, such as “big and little,” “more and less,” “open and closed,” “girl and boy.” They show an interest in counting, and can count a few items (1–3). Toddlers show curiosity about how things work and experiment.

Ways to Support Your Child

- When talking to your child, use words that describe. “Look at this leaf, it is green. This leaf is yellow. We have a green leaf and a yellow leaf— two leaves.”
- Show children how you use counting in your daily routines. “Let’s pick out some apples and put them in the bag. Help me count, ‘one, two, three.’ We have three apples in the bag.”
- Encourage your child to wonder and explore how things work. You can do this by wondering out loud, and it is okay not to have an answer. “Look at that!”

“Look at Me” Threes

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Approaches to Learning

Preschoolers use play to experiment, figure things out and solve problems. They can work longer on projects, but can get frustrated when things don’t work out.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Play pretend games with your child, and talk about “real” and “pretend.” Let your child be the leader in pretend play, and add some ideas to the play. For example, you can say, “Which animal should I pretend to be?”
- Encourage your child to solve problems, even when her efforts can turn into mistakes. Talk with them about “trying again” when something doesn’t work. Show your child how to handle difficulty and frustration in different ways. When something is hard, you can say, “Oops, that didn’t work, I’ll have to try something else.”

Emotional and Social Development

Preschoolers are learning about themselves and others. They develop friendships with other children, but still turn to adults for affection and help with challenges. Preschoolers understand and show a variety of feelings.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Encourage your child to play with other children. Talk about friendship—yours and hers—and how to be a good friend.
- Talk about feelings with your child. Let him know that people can feel different ways, and that we can use words to describe our feelings. Talk about some ways you can act when we feel certain things. For example, “When we are angry, we can stomp our feet, or say, ‘I’m angry.’ But we cannot hurt others or break things.”

Health and Physical Development

Preschoolers are growing and developing very quickly. They feed themselves. With some help with fasteners, they dress themselves. They climb and explore, and use their bodies to make things happen. Preschoolers can understand rules about health and safety.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Offer your child a variety of healthy foods, and teach her to clean up small spills. Teach your child how to take off and put on clothes, and help with the fasteners. Try to leave enough time for your child to help with dressing.
- Encourage your child to try new challenges, such as climbing steps and kicking and throwing balls.
- Teach your child about health and safety and show her how to use healthy and safe behavior, such as washing hands, wearing a seatbelt (car seat), and holding hands in crowded places.

Language Development and Communication

Preschoolers use listening and talking to learn about the world. They talk using longer sentences and include more detail. They ask questions, using “Why”, “How” and “What.” Preschoolers listen to adults reading books, look at pictures, and ask and answer questions. They learn information from listening to books and use scribbles and pictures to “write” in pretend play and writing notes and stories. They may tell you what a scribble means when they write (“Mama, this says ‘I love you.’”), and may begin to use some letters to write their name.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Talk with your preschooler all the time. Listen and answer questions. Ask questions and introduce new words. Talk about things that are important in your family, such as special holidays or events and daily routines.
- Try to read picture books every day. Read the words on the page – or make some up. Talk about the pictures, ask questions, and talk about the story. Re-read favorite stories, and ask your child to tell what will happen next. Read different kinds of books – rhyming, information (books about facts, like planes and animals), and stories.
- When you are writing—notes or lists—let your child “write” with pencil/crayons next to you. Show children how you use what you write. For example, write a grocery list together, and then read the list at the store together. Write a birthday card to a friend or family member, but remember that your preschooler’s writing may look like scribbles to you.
- Whatever your home language, continue to use it at home and in your community. Learning two languages is good for a child’s brain development.

Cognitive Development

Preschoolers play and explore and question to learn. They ask questions and experiment to find answers and learn about new things. Preschoolers use their senses to enjoy art, music, dance and drama. They can count 5 objects, and talk about *more* and *less*, *bigger*, *smaller*, and *same*.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Talk with your child about “making decisions” and “solving problems.” Help him to think about more than one way to do something: “We could use a cup to fill this bucket with water. Is there another way we could fill the bucket?” (with the hose, from the faucet, etc.)
- Your family can visit museums, churches, schools, parks and even local businesses that may have free music, art, drama and dancing for your family to watch and join. You can also turn on some music in your home and dance and sing.
- Count and measure things in your daily routines: “How many cups of water will fill this bowl,” or “Let’s count how many cars are parked on this street.”

Fantastic Fours

What should we be helping children learn before kindergarten? This handout gives some information about your child's development and learning, based on the *North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development*. We include ideas for things you can do with your child—in your daily routines of family life—that will help support your child. You can change them to fit your family's needs. If you have questions about your child's development or learning, you can speak with your child's teacher or doctor.

Approaches to Learning

Preschoolers show interest in learning many things. They ask questions to learn about how to do things, and about future events. Preschoolers use many types of play—building, pretending, exploring—to experiment and solve problems.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Encourage your child to watch, wonder, and ask questions. Help your child find answers for questions in books, newspapers, the internet or library, or by trying it out. Talk about what might happen in the near future, and afterwards, talk about what actually happened.
- Show interest in your child's play—talk about it or join in. Ask questions and introduce some new ideas. For example, if your child is playing grocery store, use old food boxes and write the “price” of the food on the box. You can cut up paper to use for money, and “buy” things at the store.

Emotional and Social Development

Preschoolers are learning how to get along with others. They develop close friendships with other children, but still go to adults for affection and help with challenges. Preschoolers begin to understand and talk about “rules” in friendships and can cooperate in play. They can understand others' feelings, and show that they care how others feel.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Talk about friendships—yours and his—and how to be a good friend. Teach your child how to “cooperate” (get along with others): “Let's set the table together. I'll get the plates for dinner. Could you please get the forks?”
- Talk about feelings with your child. Talk about some ways people can feel when things happen: “Your granddad is happy when you draw him a picture” or “Your brother feels angry when someone takes his toy.”

Health and Physical Development

Preschoolers are learning to care for themselves. They can feed themselves with help with cutting food and pouring liquids. They can dress themselves with help with buttons and zippers. Preschoolers climb and explore; they use their bodies to make things happen. They can understand rules about health and safety.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Offer your child a variety of healthy foods, and teach him to clean up small spills. You can have your child help with meal time routines. Teach your child how to take off and put on clothes and use zippers and buttons. Try to leave enough time for your child to dress himself.
- Encourage your child to try new challenges, such as climbing, kicking, and catching and throwing balls. Try playing active games with rules, like soccer or tag. Teach about health and safety and show your child how you use healthy and safe behavior, such as washing hands, wearing a seatbelt (booster seat) and holding hands in crowded places.

Language Development and Communication

Older preschoolers use watching and listening and talking to learn about the world. They talk using longer sentences and include more detail. Preschoolers ask questions, using “Why”, “How” and “What.” They listen to adults reading books, look at pictures, and ask and answer questions. Preschoolers use pictures to write, and begin to use some letters to write their name. They also begin to connect letters to sounds.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Talk with your preschooler all the time. Listen, ask and answer questions and introduce new words. Talk about things that are important in your family, such as special holidays or events and daily routines.
- Try to read picture books every day. Read the words on the page—or make some up. Talk about the pictures, ask questions, and talk about the story. Re-read favorite stories, and ask your child to tell what will happen next. Read different kinds of books— rhyming, information (books about facts, like planes and animals), and stories.
- Encourage your child to write, using paper and pencils/crayons. Praise her efforts, even though some of her marks may not look like the letters she is trying to write.
- Whatever your home language, continue to use it at home and in your community. Learning two languages is good for a child’s brain development.

Cognitive Development

Preschoolers play and explore and ask questions to learn. They develop interests in special things (dinosaurs, insects, faraway places, etc.) and new skills (writing their name, building with blocks). Preschoolers use their senses to enjoy art, music, dance and drama, and they may enjoy performing for family members. They can count up to 10 objects, and answer the question, “How many?” They compare sizes, shapes, and amounts of objects.

Ways to Support Your Child

- Encourage your child’s interests and curiosity. Get books from the library about things that interest your child, such as sports, insects, super heroes or flowers. Share your interests with your child, and talk about things that you find interesting. Let her know that you think learning is fun, too!
- Museums, churches, schools, parks and even local businesses may have free music, art, drama and dancing for your family to watch and join. You can also turn on some music in your home and dance and sing.
- Count and measure things in your daily routines. Ask questions that encourage your child to count, compare, and predict. “Let’s count how many cars are parked on this street.” “How many more cars will fit on our street? What will happen if a very big car comes?”