



New South Wales
Government



Families NSW

Communication Strategy for Parents
and Carers Project Northern Sydney |
South East Sydney | South West Sydney



LOVE Talk **SING** Read **PLAY**

The early social, emotional and intellectual
development of children.

LOVE
Talk
SING
Read
PLAY



Acknowledgements

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Families NSW (formerly Families First) is the NSW Government's prevention and early intervention strategy aimed at supporting families in raising children. Families NSW is based on a universal, population based approach to supporting families with children 0 - 8 years and is the responsibility of five partner agencies – NSW Health and the Departments of Education and Training, Housing, Community Services and Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

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Introduction

Purpose

Love, Talk, Sing, Read, Play provides evidence-based information about the early social, emotional and intellectual development of children. It presents the latest research as accessible information for service providers to pass on to parents and carers.

Audience

- Health, welfare, education and children's service providers that have contact with those caring for children.
- Community, cultural and religious leaders and employers who can communicate this information and offer the support families need.
- Organisations making use of media to inform the community.
- Policy makers whose decisions can impact upon children and families.

How to use *Love, Talk, Sing, Read, Play*

- Read the relevant sections and play the DVD and/or look at the websites and/or references listed to gain more in-depth information about the topics covered.
- Discuss with your work colleagues how you can incorporate the messages into your work.
- Photocopy the parent handouts within and at the back of the resource to have readily available to give to parents and carers.
- Some translations of the parent handouts are available from the Multicultural Health Communication website; www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au.
- Place the poster for services at the back in the reception area of your service so that your clients can ask for the handouts available.
- You could laminate the summary photograph pages and place these around your workplace. These can also be downloaded from the Families NSW website.
- If your organisation has a newsletter it sends to parents and carers or the broader community, use information from the resource to write small articles about the social, emotional and intellectual development of children.

- Make use of your organisation's website to display messages.
- Your organisation could focus on promoting a particular message for a number of months, such as the importance of play.
- In individual settings with clients you can show how everyday activities with children are opportunities for enhancing communication and connection.
- Explain what enhances development and what can damage it. Use the handouts to reinforce information given verbally.
- Help parents to anticipate developmental changes by talking about what is expected at the next developmental stage before it happens. This can increase their confidence and help them to be realistic in their expectations.
- Tailor information to the parents. Some parents want information with detailed explanations but others want short, direct messages. If parents or carers express a desire to know more than the handouts, the Supporting information sections in this resource can be photocopied for them.
- Have additional resources available, such as handouts, DVDs or lists of websites for parents who want to find out more.

Additional parent and carer resources

As well as the parent handouts in this resource, a number of parent resources have been developed by this project for distribution directly to parents and carers at transition times. These parent and carer resources are based on the same messages as this resource so that these messages are reinforced from many sources.

These resources include:

- *Parents Support Guide* in the format of a z-card with local support information in each region. This is given to new families in the hospital soon after the birth of their child.
- *Love, Talk, Sing, Read, Play*, a stages of development flip chart which has a fridge magnet attached. This is given to parents and carers at their first visit by a Child and Family Health Nurse.

In addition, new parents will also receive an interactive DVD produced by the Raising Children Network.

Outline

The sections in this resource have three parts: an introduction; a summary of key messages and supporting information.

Why is this information important? This is the introduction of the chapter and outlines the importance of the issue.

Messages These are summaries of the evidence in order to be easily understood, communicated and acted upon. These messages can be communicated by services to parents, carers and the community as appropriate.

Supporting information elaborates on the messages, providing additional information. It can be used to answer caregivers' questions.

References These can be found on the inside back cover.

Translations of the developmental charts and other information for parents are available for downloading from www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au

There is also a poster for services to laminate and display in their waiting areas to inform clients that they can ask for the parent and carer handouts.



This symbol appears at the end of each chapter and indicates websites where services can get further information.



This symbol indicates that a relevant presentation appears on the DVD found in the back pocket. This would help readers looking for more detailed information.



This symbol indicates the title of the parent and carer handouts that correspond with the relevant chapter and are found in the pocket at the back of the resource, as well as the development charts found within the resource. The handouts are based on the same messages presented throughout the resource.

Summary of messages

Why love, talk, sing, read, play?

Children's development

- 1 The emotional, social and intellectual development of children is linked; each depends on and influences the other.
- 2 Anyone caring for a child can promote their social, emotional and intellectual development by showing them love and by talking, singing, reading and playing with them. These can be part of the everyday activities of caring for a child.
- 3 It is important to have realistic expectations of what children are capable of at each stage of development.
- 4 Parents and carers can offer opportunities and experiences to children which can enhance their development at each stage.

The first three brain building years

- 1 Children's experiences in the early years of life will influence their brain development.
- 2 The relationships parents and carers have with their children creates the foundation for their children's development.
- 3 Children learn best if they feel safe and loved and have interesting things and places to explore.

Love

Helping children be their best

- 1 Secure, loving relationships with their parents and carers provide children with the foundations for all future development, including behaviour.
- 2 Children benefit from parenting that is predictable and consistent.
- 3 Children need to feel loved and feel good about themselves.
- 4 Children need to know they are safe in their home and community.
- 5 Children need limits that are reasonable in relation to their stage of development.
- 6 Parents and children learn from each other.

Talk, sing, read

Early literacy

- 1 Developing language and literacy is an ongoing process that begins in the first years of life.
- 2 Talking, singing songs, telling stories and reading books to children helps them to learn to communicate, think and cope with feelings.
- 3 It is never too early to talk, sing and read to children.

Play

Play is important

- 1 Play is vital to all aspects of children's healthy development.
- 2 Play is fun and it is a cherished part of childhood.
- 3 Children learn by playing.
- 4 Deep connections form between parents and children when they play together.
- 5 Some children's play should be child-driven and unstructured.
- 6 Everyday activities can be play and safe objects found in the home can be playthings.

LOVE Talk SING Read PLAY

Why?
why?
Why?

Children's development

Why is this information important?

Parents and carers have asked for information about child development. Consultations with parents of children aged 0-5 years across Australia found that parents wanted a range of information about children's age and developmental stages (physical, intellectual, emotional and social).

Providing information about children's development can assist parents to have realistic expectations of their children's abilities. Providing information on children's development can also help parents to be sensitive and responsive to cues given by children. Being sensitive to children's cues about their needs and responding appropriately is critical for effective parenting.



Children's development

Messages

- 1 The emotional, social and intellectual development of children is linked; each depends on and influences the other.
- 2 Anyone caring for a child can promote their social, emotional and intellectual development by showing them love and by talking, singing, reading and playing with them. These can become part of the everyday activities of caring for a child.
- 3 It is important to have realistic expectations of what children are capable of at each stage of development.
- 4 Parents and carers can offer opportunities and experiences to children which can enhance their development at each stage.

Children's development

Supporting information

1 The emotional, social and intellectual development of children is linked; each depends on and influences the other.

The most important way a child develops and learns is through interaction with others. The development of positive, caring and responsive relationships with caregivers can enhance children's wellbeing from feeling secure and confident to explore the world and other relationships.

The more parents and caregivers talk and respond to their child, the quicker he or she learns. Even though children may not understand the words, these early conversations develop their language and learning capacities which help to promote early literacy development. This begins in the first three years of life and is linked to a child's earliest experiences with stories and books.

Babies and children who are not raised with responsive parenting, who are rarely spoken to, have little opportunity to play, explore and experiment with their environment may not fully develop the brain connections and pathways that will help them learn. These children are likely to not interact with people well and are likely to be at an intellectual disadvantage when they start school. Interventions that start working with children and families before birth or from birth can help prevent this loss of potential.

2 Anyone caring for a child can promote their social, emotional and intellectual development by showing them love and by talking, singing, reading and playing with them. These can be incorporated into the everyday activities of caring for a child.

Nappy changes, feeding times and bath time are everyday opportunities for interacting with babies by touch and massage, talking, singing or playing with them at these times. Being spoken to, sung to, read to and exposed to books and other written material from a young age leads to the development of early language and literacy, which directly influences later reading and communication abilities. Also, playing with children and allowing a range of play opportunities relevant to their stage of development can enhance their physical health, emotional, intellectual and social skills.

It is the development of the relationship with the caregiver as each of these interactions is taking place that enhances the experience and is contributing to the healthy development in all aspects, not just the experience itself.

3 It is important to have realistic expectations of what children are capable of at each stage of development.

Understanding children's development can help parents to be sensitive and responsive to cues given by children. This is critical for effective parenting.

A lack of understanding about child development and unrealistic expectations can lead to damaging child-rearing practices. For instance, parents who overestimate a child's capabilities and demand performance beyond a child's developmental level (e.g. toilet training or obedience) are more likely to abuse their children. These children are also at greater risk for developmental delays and emotional disorders. It is important that parents' expectations of their children and their stage of development are not too low either.

4 Parents and carers can offer appropriate opportunities and experiences to children which can enhance their development at each stage.

Children's development at each stage can be enhanced when appropriate opportunities are offered. For example, talking to children before they can actually talk themselves assists them to learn words, communication skills and eventually reading.

Similarly, placing babies in different positions on the floor means that they can look at many things and explore in different ways. This will also assist their muscle development to work towards rolling back and forth on their stomach and increasing their strength to raise their head and chest while lying on the floor.

Children's needs and behaviour can change with each new stage of development. Being flexible and able to adapt with changes is a useful skill for parents.



More information
www.investinkids.ca
www.zerotothree.org



Parent and carer handout
Love, Talk, Sing, Read, Play. Ideas to make the most of my child's early development


The first three brain building years

Why is this information important?

Improved brain-imaging technology in recent years has made it possible to view the human brain and to understand how it develops. This information has led to a greater understanding of the importance of the experiences children receive in the early years of life and the need to inform parents and carers of this is vital to them making informed decisions about how they raise their children.

This evidence has enhanced and refined the knowledge about early brain development and how children learn, as outlined below:

Previous research	Recent research
How a brain develops depends on the genes a child is born with.	How a brain develops depends on the relationship between the genes a child is born with and the experiences a child has.
The brain's capacity to learn and change grows evenly as an infant progresses towards adulthood.	There are key times for acquiring different kinds of knowledge and skills.
A toddler's brain is much less active than the brain of a high school student.	By the age of three, children's brains are twice as active as those of adults.
Literacy skills develop when formal schooling begins.	The experiences with talking, singing and looking at books gained before starting school forms the basis for later success in literacy.
A secure relationship with a primary caregiver creates a positive framework for early childhood development and learning.	A secure relationship with a primary caregiver does more than create a positive framework for early childhood development and learning, secure relationships with one or more caregivers directly affect the way the connections develop in the brain.



The first three brain building years

Messages

- 1 Children's experiences in the early years of life will influence their brain development.
- 2 The relationships parents and carers have with their children creates the foundation for their children's development.
- 3 Children learn best if they feel safe and loved and have interesting things and places to explore.

The first three brain building years

Supporting information

Children's experiences in the early years of life will influence their brain development.

Babies are born with all of their brain cells, (about 100 billion), but the brain's architecture has not fully developed at this time. From birth, the cells in a baby's brain will begin to connect with each other and form pathways in the brain.

The genes children are born with and the experiences they have influence the architecture of their brain. The genetic make up forms the structure of the brain and the connections between the brain regions. The fine tuning of these connections depends on the experiences they have. For example, all children have the genetic capacity to learn language. Which language they speak depends on what they hear spoken by those around them.

There is a huge amount of growth in the connections (axons and dendrites) made in the brain in the first 6-12 months. In the first few years of life these cells develop vital connections in the brain that influence children's emotional, social and intellectual development.

Between birth and three years, children grow and develop faster than at any other time in their lives. By the age of three a child's brain is about 80 per cent of its adult size and it has established important pathways for future development.

2 The relationships parents and carers have with their children creates the foundation for their children's development.

The experiences babies and young children have will influence the architecture of their brain. Babies and children do best if they have at least one person who they are very close to in the first year of life that consistently provides loving care. This is called attachment.

The way in which parents and caregivers respond or do not respond to babies' cues have a direct impact on the way the brain's architecture develops and how babies feel about themselves and the world around them. Children's earliest and most basic feelings lay the groundwork for their emotional development which will determine their reactions to stress, developing trust in relationships, their confidence and ability to feel secure.

Positive early relationships and opportunities to be curious and explore, lead children to develop confidence, emotional control, the ability to get along with others and to cope with stress. They also prepare children for making the most of learning during their school years.

A caregiver who is stressed or depressed will have difficulty responding appropriately to their baby's emotional cues. If a child's emotions are repeatedly met with indifference or the opposite response, these circuits can become confused and fail to strengthen whereas the connections associated with negative feelings, such as fear and stress, are strengthened.

A baby who has been discouraged from showing appropriate emotions may have trouble later in life relating to people in appropriate ways and they may be less able to learn and relate to others at school and later in adulthood.

3 Children learn best if they feel safe and loved and have interesting things and places to explore.

Children's brains are more open to learning and enriching influences than when they are older. This also means that young children's brains are also more vulnerable to developmental problems if their environment is not nurturing or stimulating.

Every experience excites certain parts of the brain. Experiences that involve interaction, play, talking and singing will strengthen the connections for talking, learning, exploring, thinking.

For example, when a child gets excited at seeing something for the first time and their caregiver copies that excitement, circuits in the baby's brain for that emotion are strengthened.

Positive experiences that are repeated, such as being hugged or playing will consistently turn on certain parts of the brain and strengthen those brain pathways. Children who have these experiences are more likely to feel safe and comfortable in new settings and be confident to take on new learning challenges. Positive early relationships will assist children to better cope with life's challenges. Babies who have been held and cuddled calm down faster than children who have not. These early positive messages assist when they are faced with more difficult situations as they grow older.

Children who are not stimulated or live in an unsafe or stressful environment, have brain pathways that respond to fear and stress strengthened, such as those that release the stress hormone, cortisol. This can lead to these children being more likely to be stressed, anxious and unsure of themselves and their surroundings. This will make them less likely to take on new challenges and learning experiences.



More information

www.zerotothree.org/brainwonders



DVD

Zilibowitz, M. 2006, The Early Years: a developmental emergency. Child Wellbeing Seminar Series. Families First



Parent and carer handout

The first three brain building years



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LOVE Talk SING Read PLAY

Parent and carer handout

Ideas to make the most of my child's
early development.



0-2 months

What is my baby learning to do?

- ▶ Smile and laugh
- ▶ Listen to voices
- ▶ Kick legs
- ▶ Eating and sleeping patterns

Seek further advice if your baby:

- ▶ Seems floppy or stiff
- ▶ Cries a lot
- ▶ Arches his/her back a lot
- ▶ Isn't responding to sounds
- ▶ Isn't showing interest or listening when played with
- ▶ Isn't feeding as expected

See your Child and Family Health Nurse or Doctor.

How can I make the most of this time?

Love

- ▶ Cuddle and kiss your baby. Babies love to be held. You can't spoil your baby by giving too much attention.
- ▶ Babies cry because they need something. They may be hungry, tired, scared, sick, need to be held or need a nappy change. If you comfort them when they cry, they will learn that the world is safe and cry less. Spend time getting to know what your baby's different cries mean.
- ▶ Look at your child's face while they look at you as this helps bonding and helps brain development.
- ▶ Try to develop routines for baths and sleep about the same time every day.

Talk, Sing, Read

- ▶ Babies are learning from the moment they are born. Most brain development happens in your baby's first three years.
- ▶ Respond to your baby's sounds. Smile and talk back. Babies would rather listen to your voice than anything else.
- ▶ Sing or say the same rhyme each bedtime. Lullabies can help soothe and help him/her sleep.

Play

- ▶ From birth, children are keen to learn about their world by playing.
- ▶ Hold your baby's hand and let him/her grip your finger.
- ▶ Softly stroke your baby and gently move his/her arms and legs up and down when he/she is happy on his/her back.



2-6 months

What is my baby learning to do?

- ▶ Sleep less
- ▶ Interact more
- ▶ Sit with support
- ▶ Raise head and chest when lying on stomach
- ▶ Roll both ways from stomach to back
- ▶ Reach for dangling objects
- ▶ Grasp and shake objects
- ▶ Respond to their name
- ▶ Be happy to see faces they know
- ▶ Copy sounds
- ▶ Learn social skills

Seek further advice if your baby:

- ▶ Isn't learning to make sounds
- ▶ Isn't responding to familiar faces
- ▶ Isn't learning to roll when playing

See your Child and Family Health Nurse or Doctor.

How can I make the most of this time?

Love

- ▶ Babies thrive best when those around them are happy and calm.
- ▶ Value yourself and what you can do. Ask for help from family, friends and services when needed.
- ▶ Show your baby you love him/her with smiles, kisses, hugs and let him/her touch your face.

Talk, Sing, Read

- ▶ Tell your baby about what you are planning to do, such as, "I'm going to pick you up." This helps him/her feel comfortable with what is happening.
- ▶ When your baby babbles, talk and babble back.
- ▶ Your baby will copy you sticking out your tongue. You can copy things your baby does too.
- ▶ Involve your family in talking with the baby.
- ▶ Read to your baby each night while holding him/her in your lap. He or she will learn that reading is 'feeling good' time.

Play

- ▶ Babies learn from watching others, holding and putting their mouths on different things. Offer your baby new objects. Don't let them have anything that could fit entirely in their mouth. Let your baby play with your fingers and explore the breast or bottle during feeds.
- ▶ Offer your baby one toy at a time so he/she can focus on and explore each one. Good choices include a small rattle with a handle, a rubber ring, a soft doll and a board book with pictures. Hold out a toy, encourage your baby to reach and grab it, then signal to give it back. You will start to see what interests him/her most.
- ▶ Give your baby time to copy you, for example, push a button on a toy and wait for your baby to do it before you do it again. This teaches him/her that he/she can make things happen and this builds confidence.
- ▶ Place your baby in different positions on the floor so that he/she can look at many things and explore in different ways.



6-12 months

What is my baby learning to do?

- ▶ Sit without support
- ▶ Crawl on hands and knees and pull to stand
- ▶ Take steps holding onto furniture and walk with one hand held
- ▶ Pick up and throw small objects
- ▶ Hold a spoon or cup and attempt to self feed or drink
- ▶ Be scared of strangers or objects
- ▶ Look for objects that have fallen and find a hidden object
- ▶ Repeat sounds and gestures
- ▶ Respond to own name being called
- ▶ Say words like "dada" or "mama"
- ▶ Wave good bye

Seek further advice if your baby:

- ▶ Isn't responsive to carers
- ▶ Isn't babbling and making different sounds
- ▶ Isn't beginning to sit, crawl or pull to stand
- ▶ Isn't playing with feet or swapping objects between hands
- ▶ Isn't interested in holding toys
- ▶ Isn't learning to eat solids

See your Child and Family Health Nurse or Doctor.

How can I make the most of this time?

Love

- ▶ Your child may change from being friendly with everyone to wanting to cling to you and being scared of strangers. This is normal. Stay calm; provide comfort and reassurance for your child. If you are leaving your baby for a while, say goodbye and let him/her know that you will be back.
- ▶ Your child may also start to play briefly on his/her own, but he/she still needs you close by.
- ▶ Face your child so that he/she can watch your expressions to learn about them.

Talk, Sing, Read

- ▶ Use meal times for the family to talk. Encourage your child to hold food, cups, spoons, etc.
- ▶ Name things as you use them and tell your children what is going on, such as, "You're eating yummy pumpkin!" Give him/her time to respond.
- ▶ When your baby makes a sound, imitate it and continue with this back and forth, like a conversation.
- ▶ Night time routines can include looking at books together. You can point to pictures in board books and name the things you see.
- ▶ You can show your child small plastic photo albums of family and friends and help your child to touch the pictures.
- ▶ Sing, play songs and nursery rhymes throughout the day.

Play

- ▶ Play games that have songs and actions together or involve turn taking. Play games like 'peek-a-boo', clapping hands or dropping toys into a bucket. Hide toys under a bowl and let your baby find them.
- ▶ He/she will also start to use toys in more complex ways, such as pouring water with a cup or throwing food on the floor (he/she is learning new important skills, not trying to be naughty).
- ▶ Provide safe toys for bath time play – containers, rubber toys, plastic books.
- ▶ Your baby is developing his/her motor skills, such as getting a ball that rolled away.
- ▶ You can find out about joining a playgroup, a library and toy library near you.



1-2 years

What is my child learning to do?

- ▶ Walk, climb and run
- ▶ Kick and throw a ball
- ▶ Follow simple instructions
- ▶ Feed himself/herself
- ▶ Scribble with a pencil or crayon
- ▶ Say his/her first name
- ▶ Begin to cooperate when playing
- ▶ Follow simple instructions
- ▶ Point to objects when named
- ▶ Know some body parts
- ▶ Say many words and begin to join words with meaning
- ▶ Your child might be anxious about separating from you

Seek further advice if your child:

- ▶ Isn't using words or actions to communicate such as waving or raising arms up to be lifted
- ▶ Isn't wanting to move around
- ▶ Isn't responding to others
- ▶ Isn't seeking the attention of familiar people

See your Child and Family Health Nurse or Doctor.

How can I make the most of this time?

Love

- ▶ Spend time with your child doing something that your child likes so they know that you are interested.
- ▶ This is a time where children may assert their feelings and wishes and become fussy about foods or refuse to do what you ask. Encourage but do not force your child to eat. Teach simple rules about behaviour and have reasonable expectations.
- ▶ Help your child to dress, wash their hands and use the toilet when they are ready for these changes.
- ▶ Take your child to explore in a garden or a park and talk to them about what they see.

Talk, Sing, Read

- ▶ Tell your child the name of objects and then ask, "What's that?"
- ▶ Sing simple songs with finger movements. Sing along and dance with them to children's CDs. Play children's CDs at home or in the car.
- ▶ Offer your child thick crayons and paper to scribble on.
- ▶ Read stories that are predictable, with only a few words on each page or which have simple rhymes. Let him/her turn the pages. They love sturdy board books they can carry.
- ▶ Make story time part of your bedtime routine.

Play

- ▶ Your child may love to explore new things and needs your approval to do that.
- ▶ Your child may enjoy being with others who have time to spend playing, such as grandparents, friends or other children.
- ▶ Help your child to learn how to take turns and how to share when playing.
- ▶ Your child will love to use his/her imagination. He/she may like pretend play, such as feeding teddy bears or dolls. A box of old clothes can be used for playing 'dress ups'. A sheet over a couple of chairs can be a fun place to hide.



2-3 years

What is my child learning to do?

- ▶ Walk, run, climb, kick and jump easily
- ▶ Recognise and identify common objects and pictures by pointing
- ▶ Use two or three words together, such as, "go potty now"
- ▶ Say his or her name and age when asked
- ▶ Use a pencil to draw or scribble in circles and lines
- ▶ Play with other children
- ▶ Get dressed with help
- ▶ Use make believe and pretend play
- ▶ Self-feed using utensils and a cup
- ▶ Ask lots of questions
- ▶ Copy words and actions
- ▶ Make music, sing and dance
- ▶ Like listening to stories and books
- ▶ Begin to count with numbers
- ▶ Recognise similarities and differences

Seek further advice if your child:

- ▶ Isn't interested in playing
- ▶ Falling a lot
- ▶ Finds it hard to use small objects
- ▶ Isn't understanding simple instructions
- ▶ Isn't using many words
- ▶ Isn't joining words in meaningful phrases
- ▶ Isn't interested in food
- ▶ Isn't interested in others

See your Child and Family Health Nurse or Doctor.

How can I make the most of this time?

Love

- ▶ Your child is learning to be more independent, but still needs you there encouraging them.
- ▶ Your child is also learning about feelings and how to express them. You can encourage him/her to name what they are feeling at different times. Talk to your child about feelings and behaviour, for example, "I understand you were feeling angry, but you cannot hit your friend."
- ▶ Tell your child that you love them and give specific praise often. Do this at various times, so they know they are special just for being themselves.
- ▶ Spend time together doing things he/she likes to do such as kicking a ball or playing dress-ups.

Talk, Sing, Read

- ▶ Share your stories and listen to your child's stories, they are learning about you and the world around them. Take walks with your child holding hands. Talk about what you see around you.
- ▶ Children this age enjoy books with simple stories and simple rhymes they can memorise. They also like books about counting, the alphabet, shapes and sizes, animals or trucks and books about saying hello and goodbye.

Play

- ▶ Children learn by playing and playing with your child builds close bonds between you.
- ▶ Create a safe home where your child can explore.
- ▶ He/she may love playing with balls or playing on playground equipment, splashing in a pool or at the beach.
- ▶ Playing with play dough, sand and mud offer different play experiences.

Tantrums

Tantrums are common and normal around this age. Ensure that your child has enough rest, food and water throughout the day to avoid tantrums. Little tantrums are best ignored. Wait until the tantrum ends then speak to your child about how they were feeling and how else they could have done things. Try to stop their feelings getting out of control by helping them to relax, talking about why they are upset, or distracting them with a toy. It is important that you stay calm and in control.



3-5 years

What is my child learning to do?

- ▶ Speak in sentences and use many different words
- ▶ Understand opposites (big/little)
- ▶ Enjoy playing with other children
- ▶ Dress and undress with little help
- ▶ Answer simple questions
- ▶ Count 5 to 10 things
- ▶ Tell stories
- ▶ Enjoy jokes, rhymes and stories
- ▶ Have a longer attention span
- ▶ Follow simple instructions
- ▶ Toilet themselves
- ▶ Walk and run better
- ▶ Understand when someone is hurt and comfort them
- ▶ Follow simple rules and enjoy helping
- ▶ Develop independence and social skills they will use for learning and getting on with others at preschool and school

Seek further advice if your child:

- ▶ Isn't understood by others
- ▶ Has speech fluency problems or stammering
- ▶ Isn't playing with other children
- ▶ Isn't able to have a conversation
- ▶ Isn't able to go to the toilet or wash himself/herself

See your Child and Family Health Nurse or Doctor.

How can I make the most of this time?

Love

- ▶ Children need to know they are loved and to be proud of who they are. Use words that help, not hurt. Say positive things to your child.
- ▶ You could go on special outings, such as to a petting zoo, art gallery, museum or bush walk.
- ▶ Older brothers and sisters can play and look at books with younger children.

Talk, Sing, Read

- ▶ Read books with simple text that your child can memorise or read.
- ▶ Let your child choose books from the library. Help him/her find books about their interests, e.g. dinosaurs, trains, dogs, etc.
- ▶ Look for books about events happening in their lives, such as starting school.
- ▶ Point out signs, food packets and other ways language and pictures are used when you shop.
- ▶ Children this age like to tell stories. You can help them make their own books with pictures.
- ▶ Take your child for a walk and tell him/her about their family and their history.

Play

- ▶ Your child may like playing puzzles, board games, card games or 'I spy' with you.
- ▶ Caring for pets and planting seeds in pots and watching them grow teaches children about living things.
- ▶ Paper plates can be made into masks. Your child can cut out the shape for eyes, nose and mouth and glue things on or paint the mask.
- ▶ Offer your child objects that can be sorted into size or colour, such as clothes or pencils.
- ▶ Housework can be fun and your child can learn skills by helping to cook or putting things away into cupboards.

LOVE Talk SING Read PLAY

Love
LOVE
Love

Helping children be their best

Why is this information important?

Children's behaviour, mental health and wellbeing results from the interaction between their genes and what they experience as they are growing up, particularly the relationship with their parents and other caregivers.

Parents and carers want the best for the children in their care but are not always informed of the protective value of positive methods of parenting and the potentially adverse consequences of harsh or inconsistent disciplinary approaches to parenting.

This chapter outlines a positive parenting approach that helps to create a loving and respectful relationship between parent and child. This style of parenting is an important predictor of children's positive mental health and ongoing success in life. This style of parenting comes from an understanding of parenting behaviour developed, particularly from research about attachment.

Previous positive parenting information campaigns in Australia have shown that even where attachment has been insecure and parenting styles involve low warmth, harsh discipline or over-protection, each of these factors can be modified with knowledge. Parenting styles can become more flexible and adaptable when information is matched to the learning needs of parents.



Helping children be their best

Messages

- 1 Secure, loving relationships with their parents and carers provides children with the foundations for all future development, including behaviour.
- 2 Children benefit from parenting that is predictable and consistent.
- 3 Children need to feel loved and feel good about themselves.
- 4 Children need to know they are safe in their home and community.
- 5 Children need limits that are reasonable in relation to their stage of development.
- 6 Parents and children learn from each other.

Helping children be their best

Supporting information

1 Secure, loving relationships with their parents and carers provide children with the foundations for all future development, including behaviour.

From birth, children need to know that there is at least one special person who really cares about them, will comfort them and will always be there for them. This pattern of relationship is called attachment. Children benefit from attachment with their mother and father as well as attachments with other family members, family friends and other carers in their lives.

Most children learn to regulate their reactions and feelings through emotional connections with significant others and learned self-understanding. Children use their face, voice and body to communicate. Parents or caregivers need to be able to understand their child's reactions and to provide an appropriate response. When this happens an emotional connection is established which makes the child feel safe, valued and confident.

These early positive interactions result in children having better play skills, problem solving and persistence. Studies show that securely attached infants have better psychological adjustments later in life. These early opportunities are optimal for positive outcomes, however, not all insecure children will necessarily have poorer outcomes as adults if opportunities continue throughout life to mitigate earlier negative relationships.

2 Children benefit from parenting that is predictable and consistent.

A secure attachment in the first year of life can result from parenting that is loving, predictable and consistent. This has been shown to have a positive effect on the social, emotional and mental development of children. On the other hand, if the care a baby receives has been unresponsive, erratic or threatening, this can lead to attachment problems that have an ongoing negative effect on development.

These strong and secure attachments that result from consistent and predictable parenting can also help to foster resilience. Resilience is the ability to cope and bounce back from difficulties that happen in life. Building strengths in children's lives that protect and promote their wellbeing can help them to develop resilience. Resilience is an important factor in positive mental health.

3 Children need to feel loved and feel good about themselves.

When children face difficulties there are several factors that can help protect them.

These protective factors include:

- Support from family and friends.
- Knowing they are loved and lovable.
- Supervision and limit setting.
- Feeling they make a contribution.
- Feeling they can succeed.
- Feeling good about themselves.
- Trying new things.
- Feeling included and appreciated.
- Feeling they can rely on adults.
- Feeling positive about life and the future.
- Having people they can look up to.
- Learning to have a go and keep trying.

A person is not born with a high or low self-esteem; self-esteem is developed in childhood and can be changed throughout life. Having high self-esteem means valuing, liking and believing in yourself and what you can do. Children who have a healthy self-esteem are likely to be happy, cooperative, successful at school and make friends easily. They are also likely to cope with stress effectively and are less likely to develop behaviour problems. Good self-esteem builds a solid foundation for life. Children with low self-esteem may lack confidence, withdraw, be anxious or insecure, or have behaviour problems.

Children from all cultures need to have a place in the family and society. They need to know they are loved and belong because of the special person they are.

The examples set by parents and carers are powerful influences in shaping children's behaviour. Children learn self control and good behaviour when those around them treat them with respect. If adults treat others with kindness, respect and patience, children will follow their example. If adults shout and behave violently, children will learn this type of behaviour.

Saying positive things to children helps them feel positive about themselves and about the person saying it. It is always possible to frame information in a positive way. Children can develop skills and independence from being encouraged to have a go and being praised for their attempts even if not perfect.

4 Children need to know they are safe in their home and community.

Childhood is about growing, learning and having fun. Children grow and learn best in a safe home and community. Children's optimal brain development occurs when children are happy and stimulated; brain development can be damaged by stress. Children are also sensitive to parents' stress and may misbehave or withdraw as a result. Experiencing violence in the home, or feeling unsafe can have a very negative impact on children's brains and their development. They can grow up fearful and anxious.

Studies have also shown that children do best if they can feel safe in the area where they live and where their family know and trust their neighbours.

5 Children need limits that are reasonable in relation to their stage of development.

Clear explanations about what to do, what not to do and praise for good behaviour are effective ways of encouraging children to become responsible members of the family and community. Rules need to be fair and reasonable. It is important for parents to give children a reason for what they are doing, or for what they are asking children to do. Being overly strict or controlling may have negative effects on children.

As children get older they can be encouraged to have more input in decisions or events that affect their lives. This can start at a young age by giving children two choices when it is appropriate, e.g. orange or apple juice, red or green shirt and building upon that. Children need assistance to learn and develop problem solving skills, how to make choices and accept the consequences for these. This develops resilience and confidence in dealing with problems when they arise.

Hitting or injuring children is not an effective way to influence behaviour and can harm their development. Physical punishment destroys children's dignity and teaches them that problems are best solved by using violence.

Parents and children learn from each other.

Children learn from watching their parents and those around them. Parents also learn from their children about how best to understand and support their individual personalities. Parents and carers can listen for and respond sensitively to children's needs and build on their strengths. This can happen when parents and carers have empathy and respect for the children in their care and are open to learning, growing and changing in their role as parents and carers.



More information

www.econnections.com.au
www.investinkids.ca



DVD

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Parent and carer handout

Helping children be their best

LOVE Talk SING Read PLAY

Talk
SING
Read

Early literacy

Why is this information important?

There are strong links between language and communication, literacy, school performance, self-esteem and life chances. Early exposure to reading is crucial to a child's development and future success. This fits with the current understanding of brain development in the first three years of life. According to international research, children who have not developed emergent literacy skills (the ability to identify and manipulate sounds) by school age are unlikely to catch up with other children. Poor literacy skills are associated with generally lower education, earnings, health and social outcomes as well as being linked to high rates of unemployment and welfare dependence.

Evidence shows that babies learn to talk and communicate from birth and this helps them learn other things, like reading. Reading to children helps their language development and helps them acquire early knowledge of letters and the sounds they make and this information assists them learn to read. The earlier they learn the basics of reading, the better they will be at reading and learning. Professionals who have a close working relationship with families are well placed to deliver messages about the importance of reading with young children.

Early literacy



Messages

- 1 Developing language and literacy is an ongoing process that begins in the first years of life.
- 2 Talking, singing songs, telling stories and reading books to children helps them to learn to communicate, think and cope with feelings.
- 3 It is never too early to talk, sing and read to children.

Early literacy

Supporting information

1 Developing language and literacy is an ongoing process that begins in the first years of life.

The process of developing language and learning to read and write begins in the first three years of life and is closely linked to a child's earliest experiences. Children gain significant knowledge of language, reading and writing long before they enter school. Children learn to talk, read and write by interacting with other children and adults, listening to stories, looking at books and by scribbling with crayons and pencils on paper.

The development of literacy skills (reading and writing) is different from the development of language, but dependent on it. As soon as they are born, babies are learning to communicate and react to different sounds. Babies communicate by crying and squealing, copying other people's actions, making eye contact, smiling and laughing, looking at objects and people, banging, throwing and mouthing objects. The sounds babies make are purposeful and meaningful, like blowing raspberries to show excitement, babbling and cooing, and taking turns to make sounds. They will develop skills to understand language before they start speaking. Developing these skills early will help their ability to communicate.

2 Talking, singing songs, telling stories and reading books to children helps them to learn to communicate, think and cope with feelings.

Babies and children who are spoken, sung and read to become more advanced in their language development than those who are not. Developing language skills is necessary for developing other thinking and reading skills, so talking and listening to a baby even before they can talk helps them learn to communicate. This can be done in the language that is spoken at home.

Stories can help children to cope with a lot of the feelings and problems that they experience in their day. These can be stories that are told or stories that are read. Children react emotionally to stories, they begin to understand emotions and relate to how others characters in the stories feel. Telling children anecdotes about their family members and stories about their culture and history can promote children's sense of belonging which can assist in developing a healthy self-esteem.

3 It is never too early to talk, sing and read to children.

Babbling, listening to words, singing nursery rhymes playing with books and scribbling are the building blocks for language and literacy development.

Research indicates that exposure to books at home, including being read to, library visits and parents' own exposure to books, can play an important role in language and literacy development.

Emergent literacy skills are the skills that develop before reading, but are needed for reading.

These skills develop from:

- ▶ The ability to use language and understand words.
- ▶ The ability to identify the names and sounds of the alphabet.
- ▶ The ability to identify and manipulate sounds.
- ▶ Understanding print conventions such as how a book works.
- ▶ Having books in the home and a literacy environment where adults are seen reading.

Early literacy, however, does not mean early reading. The best way to promote children's literacy is by allowing children's skills to develop naturally from the enjoyment of books and the positive interactions between adults and children and other fun activities around books, like going to libraries. Early literacy is not about trying to make children read and write actual words. Expecting young children to read who are not developmentally ready could be damaging and children may then associate reading with failure rather than fun.



More information
www.rch.org.au



Parent and carer handout
Talk, Sing and Read

LOVE Talk SING Read **PLAY**

Play
Play
Play

Play is important

Why is this information important?

Play is so important for children's development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child. Play is one of the most important needs children have and it is through play that children do most of their learning.

The environment in which children are growing up has changed dramatically over the past decades. It is increasingly rare for children to have long, uninterrupted blocks of time to play outdoors and indoors by themselves or with friends. This is due to changes in lifestyle, as well as more urban development, fewer and smaller open spaces and more emphasis on structured children's activities, such as coached sports or tutoring.

It is important for services to promote the value of play and a child's need to play with parents and carers. It is also important that messages about the protective benefits to children of unstructured play time and child-directed play are promoted widely.

Play is important

Messages

- 1 Play is vital to all aspects of children's healthy development.
- 2 Play is a cherished part of childhood and playing is fun.
- 3 Children learn by playing.
- 4 Deep connections form between parents and children when they play together.
- 5 Some children's play should be child-driven and unstructured.
- 6 Everyday activities can be play and safe objects found in the home can be playthings.

Play is important

Supporting information

1 Play is vital to all aspects of children's healthy development.

Play is one of the most important needs children have. It offers the opportunity for their parents and carers to engage with them in a fun way that develops their positive relationship and play is vital for their social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. For this reason it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child.

2 Play is a cherished part of childhood and playing is fun.

Childhood is about exploring, discovering and having fun. Children form strong memories from their time playing and these become their cherished childhood memories.

Play is important for healthy brain development. Children learn about the world around them from play. Play allows children to use their imagination, dexterity and physical, cognitive and emotional strength.

Children can grow in confidence and self-esteem by creating a world they can be in control of, conquering their fears and pretending to be an adult. This also helps build their skills for facing future challenges, thereby building resilience.

Children are active when they play. They are working their mind and their bodies and in this way play promotes a healthy lifestyle. Play also makes children stronger, prevents obesity and helps reduce stress. Stimulation and play are especially important if a child has a disability.

3 Children learn by playing.

Children don't play in order to learn, they play because it is fun, but they are learning while they are playing. The process of play and learning stimulate each other.

Playing encourages children to observe, explore and express themselves. Playing helps them learn to develop socially, physically and intellectually.

Play builds children's knowledge and experience and helps develop their curiosity and confidence. Children learn about their world by trying new things when playing, comparing results, asking questions and meeting challenges. Play develops language, thinking, planning, organising and decision-making skills.

4 Deep connections form between parents and children when they play together.

When children play with others they learn to make new friends, solve problems, cope with a range of situations, get on with other people, share, take turns and understand themselves and the different ways other people think.

There also appears to be a close relationship between symbolic play and literacy development. Pretend play with peers involves the same kind of thinking needed in early literacy activities. Children start to link objects, actions and language together in combinations and narrative sequences and develop language suited to different viewpoints and roles.

Children's parents and carers are their first playmates. Children and their parents and carers can get to know each other through play. By playing with their children, parents let their children know that they are important, interested in them and that they are loved. Feeling loved helps children learn and develop well. This increases children's confidence to take on new challenges. This in turn helps them learn to cope with new situations and difficulties that arise.

Play offers parents and carers the opportunity to build positive relationships with their children in an atmosphere that is fun. Playing with children also offers opportunities to promote self-esteem when parents and carers offer positive reinforcement, praise and approval for trying new things.

It is important that parents or carers make some time each day to play with their young children.

5 Some children's play should be child-driven and unstructured.

Play builds some of the individual assets children need to develop and be resilient, so some play should be what the child decides it should be. This means that the child is the one directing play with parents as passive observers.

Child-directed play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts and to learn self-advocacy skills. When children direct their play they can practice decision-making skills and follow their interests in their own time. Play controlled by adults is different, because it follows adult rules and perceptions, as do most activities in children's lives.

6 Everyday activities can be play and safe objects found in the home can be playthings.

All children need a variety of simple materials to play with that are suitable for their stage of development. Water, sand, cardboard boxes, wooden building blocks, pots and lids are safe objects found in the home that can be toys. Children don't need expensive toys, but they do need a variety of things to play with.

Everyday objects can be used in many ways – a chair can be a house, a rocket, a car or a castle. Below are some examples of how children learn and develop by playing with things in the house:

- ▶ Putting a smaller box in a bigger box helps babies and toddlers learn to use their fingers and work out how different sizes fit together.
- ▶ Drawing, painting, pasting and threading helps children learn and practice fine motor skills that will help them write and manipulate small objects.
- ▶ Dressing up helps children become imaginative and creative.
- ▶ Dramatic play and pretending to be other people helps children understand adult roles.



More information

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au



Parent and carer handout

Play is important

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LOVE Talk SING Read PLAY



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