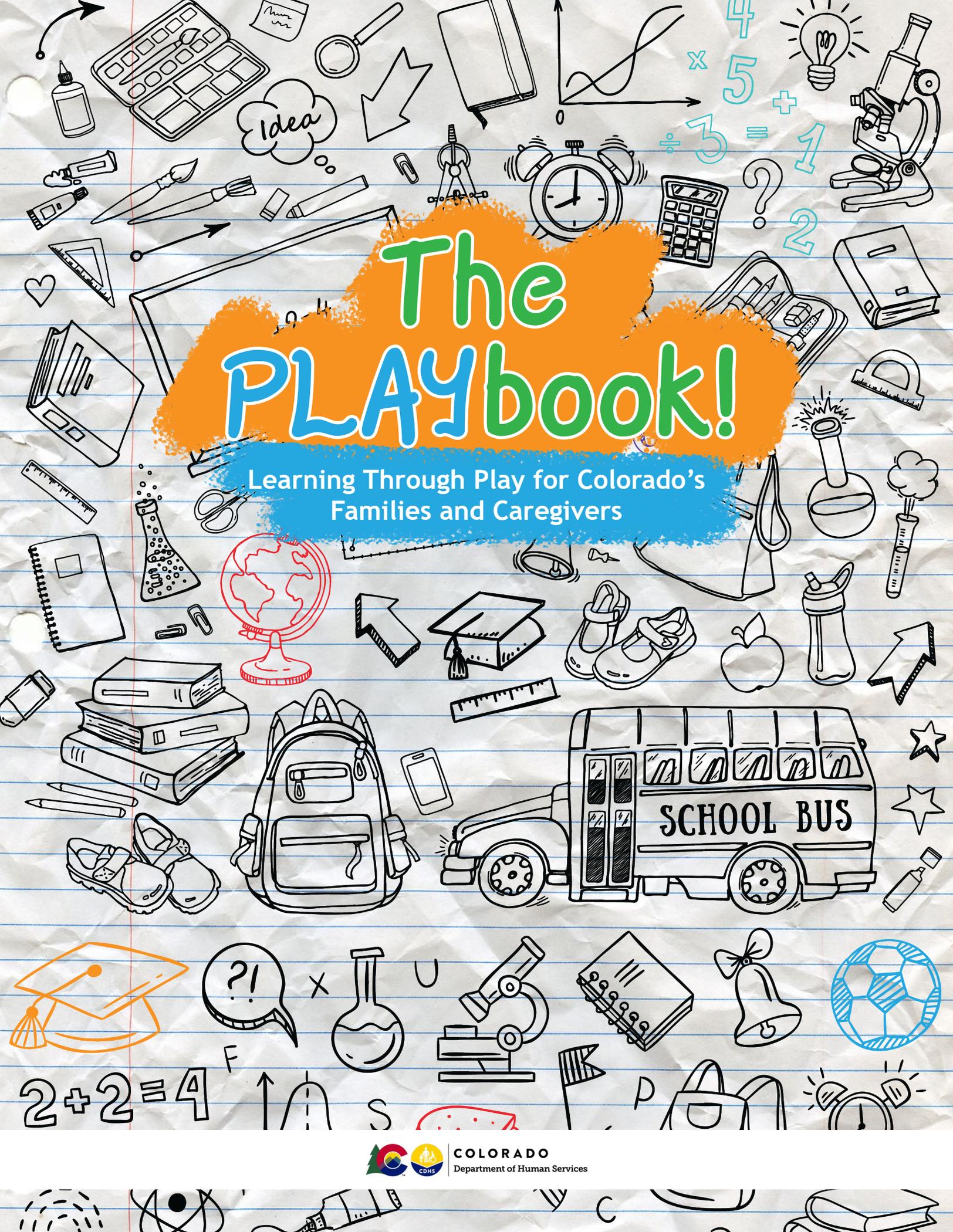


The PLAYbook!

Learning Through Play for Colorado's Families and Caregivers



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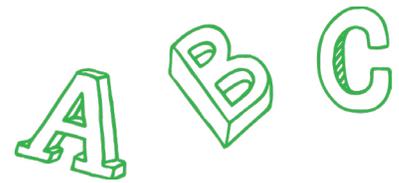
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COLORADO
Department of Human Services

Welcome to the PLAYbook!



Children are curious about how the world around them works. That is why they learn best through play and exploration. This learning begins long before children enter kindergarten, making early experiences important for future success. No matter the role we have in a child's life - whether as parents, teachers, child care providers or involved relatives, friends or neighbors - we all play an important part in their development. All experiences, good and bad, easy and hard, affect a child's development and future learning. We can use those experiences to help them grow.

The PLAYbook showcases activities that support healthy child development. These fun ideas set the child up for a lifelong love of learning. They can be part of your everyday routines at home, outdoors and in the community. Children are learning all the time, especially when they are playing. You can be

a trusted guide. Children who feel safe are ready to learn.

The content in this book is aligned with the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines, which offer practical tips that everyone can use to **ensure children are valued, healthy and thriving**. Colorado's early childhood advocates and experts spent countless hours creating the Guidelines. The Guidelines reflect the latest national research and broadly accepted strategies currently used statewide. The PLAYbook also shares researched and proven practices and resources to support you and your family. To learn more about the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines visit earlylearningco.org.

Now, get out there and PLAY!



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A strong foundation for learning starts at birth!

Babies: Children Ages 0–4 Months Old

Growth & Learning - In the first months after birth, babies change and grow quickly. Newborns learn about the world by seeing, listening, tasting, smelling and touching. Even when babies are born early or with medical concerns, they quickly begin to show the

desire to learn and interact. Even as newborns, babies are communicating their needs and preferences. In addition to helping them learn, this lays the foundation for their sense of attachment and security with their caregivers.

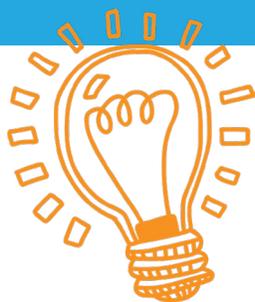
Brain Builders



During a baby's first few months, the basic brain development that supports later learning is being organized. Babies' brains grow more rapidly during this time than any other period following birth.ⁱ The brain increases in size by over 60 percent by the end of the third month.ⁱⁱ You help grow their brain when you support and recognize the connections they are forming. They are learning about the world through their senses (touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste). For example, because babies learn through their sense of touch, skin-to-skin contact is a way to support their growing brain. You also support their growing brain through providing consistent, responsive and sensitive care.

Quick Tip!

Read aloud to children every day, even when they are babies. Remember: you don't have to read stories word-for-word when children are young. Simply looking at pictures and describing what you see will build early literacy skills and engage children. Your local library is a great partner to learn about children's books. Visit the [Colorado State Library website](#) for resources to support children's language and reading skills.



What Babies May Be Doing

What You Can Do To Support Babies

Babies may react to sounds, lights or activity. They may throw their arms out to the side when startled.

These are normal responses. Move the baby to a quiet space. This will protect them from too much noise or activity. Babies are also soothed by the sound of their caregiver's voice. Talk and sing to them.

Babies may engage in repetitive actions with their body (e.g., kicking legs, banging hands).

These are normal early behaviors that help babies develop their senses and understand how their bodies work.

Babies may adjust their posture for comfort. They may snuggle into a caregiver's body when being held or fed. *NOTE: Babies who are born early may move differently or use body positions that are different from those of typical babies.

Offer a variety of positions for babies when they are awake. Try holding them in your arms, on your shoulder, or on their back, sides or stomach. This will promote body movement. It will also help to acquaint them with different postures.

Babies may begin to follow faces with their eyes. Later, they may do so by moving their head. They may copy facial expressions in response to parents' or caregivers' voices or smiles.

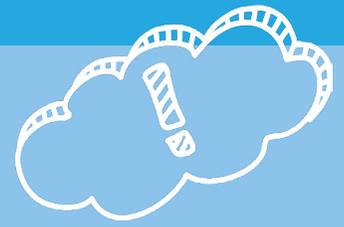
Build skills and trust simply by looking at babies warmly and quietly while they are awake. Match their level of interest and ability to take in sounds and actions.

Babies may develop their ability to self-soothe and regulate their emotions.

Even early signs of this skill (e.g., hand sucking) take time to develop. In the meantime, when babies seem overwhelmed, move them to a calm environment.

Babies may develop a sense of trust and security with parents and caregivers.

Provide consistent routines that help babies know what to expect. This may mean feeding and changing diapers the same way each time.



Activities Babies Like

Hold, cuddle and rock babies. Give them plenty of time and attention during the day. Provide plenty of physical contact. There is no such thing as holding a baby too much.

Give babies chances to move their arms and legs around as they discover their bodies. Place the baby on a blanket, naming body parts such as toes and fingers.

Talk to babies often.

- Talk in a gentle voice that is predictable and consistent.
- Talk about what babies are doing, what they are looking at, noises they hear and what is around them.
- You can talk to babies about everything!
- Make eye contact when speaking to babies.

Read to babies every day. You may or may not choose to read the words in the story. It is just as great for you to describe what you see on each page in the book. You can also make up your own story to go with the pictures.

Listen to soft music and sing to babies. Try music of different cultures, particularly the baby's culture. Visit [storyblocks.org](https://www.storyblocks.org) for culturally relevant songs and videos for kids.

Try "Tummy time" by supervising babies on their tummy on a clean soft surface throughout the day. Place a mirror, book or toy in front of babies when doing "Tummy time" to keep them engaged.

Remember

Children develop at their own pace. Each child is unique. Children of the same age may have different abilities but still be developing typically for their age. If you think that a child might need further evaluation of their development, speak with the child's parents as soon as possible. Parents can contact their child's doctor or contact Early Intervention Colorado (call toll-free: 888.777.4041) if they are concerned.

As babies grow, it is important to keep their health and nutrition in mind. Your relationship and bond with them is also extremely important.



Things to Think About

Notes

Did you and the baby have fun playing? How did you know you and the baby were having fun?

Which activity did the baby enjoy the most?

Was there any activity that the baby did not like? How would you change it?

What activities are the most soothing for the baby when they are upset?

What did you learn about the baby?

What other ideas do you have?



Follow this checklist to keep babies 0–4 months old safe and healthy.

- Keep your home safe. Install and maintain a smoke alarm. Cover all outlets and electrical cords. Supervise all children, especially babies.
- Use and correctly install car seats. To learn how to correctly install a car seat, visit your local fire department.
- Practice safe sleep. Babies should be sleeping **alone** on their **backs**. Bare cribs are best! The only things that should be in a baby's crib are a firm mattress, a fitted sheet and a sleeping baby in a sleep sack. Use a sleep sack to keep babies warm. Keep rooms at a temperature comfortable for a lightly clothed adult. If you are swaddling a baby, discontinue when the baby can roll over.
- Get plenty of sleep. In the first four months, aim for babies to have 14-17 hours of sleep (including naps) every 24 hours.
- Make sure babies get enough to eat. Feed babies breast milk or formula when they are hungry. When you see a need and respond in a timely manner, you help the child develop healthy habits.
- Reach out to a doctor when you have questions. Doctors are available and willing to take calls. They can support caregivers in many topics, including breastfeeding and health concerns. If your concern is urgent, call the baby's doctor and take the baby to the emergency room.
- Learn how to recognize the signs of depression. Feelings of guilt, frustration and withdrawal are common among new parents, but you don't have to feel this way. Having a baby is hard! If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, visit postpartum.net/colorado to get information about pregnancy-related depression. You can also find Colorado coordinators who can give you support and resources in your area. Call 1.800.944.4773 to get confidential, free and immediate support.



It is easy to feel overwhelmed when caring for babies. Caring for a new baby probably takes up most (if not all) of your time. It can be hard to fit in time for taking care of your own basic needs. Remember that you need to take care of yourself to be able to take care of children.



Quick Tip!

Children benefit from learning songs in a variety of languages; sing to them in your home language or try out new songs. Resources for many more songs, rhymes, movement-based activities and fingerplay for children can be found at [storyblocks.org](https://www.storyblocks.org).

Babies: Children Ages 4–8 Months Old

Growth & Learning - Babies from 4-8 months are using their senses more and more! They may explore objects with their mouth. They may explore by kicking, reaching, grasping, pulling and letting go. They delight in

discovering new skills. Babies at this age can smile, laugh, coo and reach out to engage their parents and other caregivers. They love to listen and respond to language by imitating the sounds and rhythms they hear.

Quick Tip!

Instead of feeling guilty about screen time, use it to spark children's creativity! Learn more at youtu.be/PcRecahZSpE.

Brain Builders

Babies' brains continue to grow rapidly during the next few months. In fact, a baby's brain will double in size across the first year.ⁱⁱⁱ One way to build a baby's brain is through back-and-forth interaction. It works much like a game of tennis.^{iv} Healthy development occurs when young children "serve" through babbling, gestures or words. Adults then "return" by getting in sync with the child. Looking for a baby's serves and returning them is one way to support babies' learning. It also helps them build core life skills. The connections you are building now as a trusted caregiver will be a support for the child's readiness to learn when they enter kindergarten.

What Babies May Be Doing

Babies may look at an object in their hand, put the object in or near their mouth and then take it out to look at it again.

Babies may hold up their heads, rolling from back to stomach and from stomach to back. They may sit without support or move from a sitting position onto hands and knees.

Babies may cry when they hear another baby cry or stop to look at a child who is crying.

Babies may repeat sounds when babbling, such as “dadadada” or “babababa.”

Babies may respond to a wave by waving and saying, “Bye-bye.”

Babies may shake a toy, hearing the sound it makes and then shaking it again. They may bang a spoon on the table, noticing the loud sound it makes and then doing it again.

What You Can Do To Support Babies

Expose babies to a variety of sensory experiences like sights, sounds, tastes, textures, movements and smells—both indoors and outdoors.

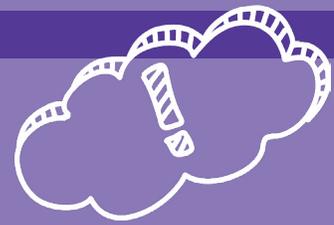
Provide opportunities for babies to move and engage in a variety of physical activities, such as lying on a blanket on the floor in a safe area.

Talk about what other children are feeling or expressing with their sounds, gestures or facial expressions.

Respond to a baby’s cooing and babbling and talk as if they understand everything you are saying. Imitate sounds or gestures they make and allow time for them to imitate you.

Use daily routines, such as leaving, to role-play social language games. Try waving goodbye or blowing kisses.

Offer toys that babies can grasp. Watch for a response. Shake sound toys so they can hear the noises they make and react. Respond to them, pointing out the effects of their actions on toys. For example, say, “Look how you made the big blue ball move!”



Remember

Children develop at their own pace. Each child is unique. Children of the same age may have different abilities but still be developing typically for their age. If you think that a child might need further evaluation of their development, speak with the child's parents as soon as possible. Parents can contact their child's doctor or contact Early Intervention Colorado (call toll-free: 888.777.4041) if they are concerned.

Play and exploration are cornerstones of early learning. Play helps children learn, use their imaginations and express themselves creatively. During play children can use their senses to try new things, make predictions and solve problems. These types of activities build core life skills that will give children a strong start as they enter kindergarten.



Activities Babies Enjoy

Pay close attention to what babies are doing. Simply notice what they are focused on. Share your attention with them by looking at or pointing to the same thing. Next, respond supportively to what they seem interested in. This can be as simple as responding and smiling! If they are pointing at an object (or even looking at it), pick it up and bring it close to the baby. You might also try naming the object. Naming what they are interested in builds important language connections.^v

Sing songs and say nursery rhymes to babies. Try different rhymes and songs to find their favorites. Some examples to try are “Pat-a-cake,” “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” and “Row, row, row your boat.” Sing nursery rhymes that are representative of other cultures and representative of the baby’s culture. What songs or rhymes did your family sing to you as a baby?

Read books to babies. Describe what you see on the pages. Make up your own story to go with the pictures. Read books in any language. Let babies hold and play with books.

Give babies opportunities to move around and engage in a variety of physical activities. Let them try lying on a blanket on the soft ground or in the grass in a safe area. Make sure they can move their arms and legs. Try “Tummy time” outside.

Blow bubbles with babies. Make different sounds and noises when they pop. When playing, use different noises. Sounds help babies develop the basics of language.

Try holding babies up in front of a big mirror. You can also place a small mirror in front of them.

Reuse clean plastic bottles by filling them with various small objects. You could try cotton balls or buttons. Make sure the bottle lid is secured by closing tight and gluing. Babies can hold, shake and look at the bottle. Notice what the baby is interested in and describe what they are seeing.

Play games like “peek-a-boo.” This activity helps babies develop memory. They work to remember who is hiding. They also develop self-control as they wait for you to reveal yourself.

Try a change of scenery. Take babies inside and outside.



Things to Think About

Notes

Did you and the baby have fun playing? How did you know you and the baby were having fun?

Which activity did the baby enjoy the most?

Was there any activity that the baby did not like? How would you change it?

What activities are the most soothing for the baby when they are upset?

What did you learn about the baby?

How did you praise the baby for trying a new activity and for positive behaviors? What other ways can you encourage them?

What other ideas do you have?

Caregiving is hard work and can be stressful. It's a good idea to lean on friends, family and other trusted people in your community. They can provide advice and support.



Follow this checklist to keep babies 4–8 months old safe and healthy.



- Children put small things in their mouths. Keep areas clear of objects that babies could swallow. If an object is less than 1.25 inches, it could pose as a choking hazard. A quarter is almost one inch.
- Keep your home safe as babies start rolling from back to stomach and from stomach to back:
 - Keep matches and lighters out of reach of children.
 - Keep all medicines and cleaning supplies in containers with safety caps. Store them in a locked cabinet.
 - Never leave children unattended in a bathtub, bathroom, pool or near a bucket.
- Enjoy time outside. Remember to put sunscreen on children over 6 months old. For babies under 6 months old, avoid direct sunlight. Dress them with brimmed hats and lightweight clothing. Cover their arms and legs when outside.
- Babies enjoy moving their bodies. Support their growth by avoiding prolonged periods in devices that restrict movements, like mechanical swings or baby carriers. Babies should spend no more than 30 minutes at a time in these devices unless they are eating or being transported.
- At this age babies should typically sleep 12-15 hours (including naps) in a 24-hour period. It's important to start establishing healthy sleep routines. Parents and caregivers can work together to support healthy sleep routines for babies.
- Babies may begin to show more interest in food. Introduce healthy strained foods, then finger foods like dry cereal and cooked vegetables. Follow your healthcare provider's recommendations.
- You can take care of babies' teeth and gums even before you can see the first tooth. Use a clean, damp washcloth to wipe the gums. Do this twice a day, especially after night feeding.
- Clean pacifiers with soap and water. Never clean a pacifier in your mouth before giving it to a baby. Germs that cause tooth decay can pass from your mouth to the baby's mouth.
- Make sure to supervise babies when they are drinking their bottle.
- It's important for parents to continue to arrange for regular well-check visits with their baby's doctor. Doctors can answer any health and nutrition questions.

Toddlers: Children Ages 9–18 Months Old

Growth & Learning - At this age, toddlers are starting to walk and talk. They practice communication by babbling. They understand and can respond to more words. They are likely to show preferences for their parents or other adults in their life. In fact, toddlers form powerful attachment bonds to their primary caregivers at this age. Toddlers

will also begin actively exploring their environment, often putting things they find into their mouth. An important way to support a toddler's learning is to encourage them to explore their environment and practice their independence, after ensuring the environment is safe. They may also be fascinated with their peers around this age.



Brain Builders

Toddlers' brains are quickly growing and rapidly forming connections. They are greatly affected by the world around them and new experiences.^{vi} Serve-and-return interactions continue to be very important. During this period, focus on sharing attention with toddlers. When they point at items, look with them. Help them name what they are interested in. Your shared attention, interest and naming of objects will greatly benefit toddlers' learning and language.

What Toddlers May Be Doing

What You Can Do To Support Toddlers

Toddlers may creep on hands and knees or feet. They may pull up to a stand and use furniture for support. They may also be cruising while holding onto furniture or walking without support.

Encourage toddlers to move to get what they want. Provide “props” such as simple toys with wheels as they experiment with standing and walking.

Toddlers may point to parts of the body when asked.

Play naming games. Name parts of the body while holding the toddler or while looking in the mirror.

Toddlers may become upset when care is being provided by someone other than their primary caregiver.

Primary caregivers can create a short ritual around “goodbye time.” However, when it is time to depart, caregivers should leave quickly. When the caregiver is gone, provide a comfort object such as a blanket, book or pacifier.

Toddlers may use comfort objects, such as a special blanket or stuffed toy, to calm down. They may seek closeness with a parent or caregiver when upset.

Recognize when toddlers have comforted themselves. For example, say, “You found your bear and made yourself feel better.” Offer a hug. Smile and laugh with them.

Toddlers may use two words together, such as “Daddy give.”

Try expanding on toddlers’ simple sentences to help them build vocabulary. For example, “You want daddy to give you the ball?” Use new and familiar words or sign language. Repeat these words in different ways.

Toddlers may build a tower with blocks and kick it over. They may then build it up and knock it down again.

Provide cause and effect toys, like jack-in-the-boxes. Also provide toys with moving parts, like cars. Demonstrate how they work.

Toddlers may bring a small stool over to reach a toy on top of a shelf, having observed an adult do it.

Encourage toddlers to solve problems. For example, say, “You are working hard on that puzzle.” Help only when they show you that they need help.

Remember



Children develop at their own pace. Each child is unique. Children of the same age may have different abilities but still be developing typically for their age. If you think that a child might need further evaluation of their development, speak with the child's parents as soon as possible. Parents can contact their child's doctor or contact Early Intervention Colorado (call toll-free: 888.777.4041) if they are concerned.

Play and exploration are cornerstones of early learning. Play helps children learn, use their imaginations and express themselves creatively. During play children can use their senses to try new things, make predictions and solve problems. These types of activities build core life skills that will give children a strong start as they enter kindergarten.



Activities Toddlers Enjoy

Play music and dance with toddlers. Listen to music that you and the toddlers in your care can enjoy together.

Create an obstacle course with pillows, couch cushions and chairs for toddlers to climb around, over and under. Modify based on whether the child is walking or crawling.

Create push/pull toys for toddlers to move around. You can use empty cardboard boxes.

Play with toddlers by stacking towers and blocks. Children can use paper or plastic cups to create stacks.

Encourage toddlers to touch, see, smell and listen when outdoors. They can learn and explore using their senses.

- Talk about the outdoors. Explain the ways that trees bend and what the clouds look like.
- Let them feel or experience rough trees, blowing wind, slippery mud, smooth stones, warm air and cold rain. Talk to them about the experience.
- Collect rocks or leaves, then sort them by size, color and shape.

Dig in the dirt outside with toddlers. Don't forget buckets, bowls, measuring cups or spoons. You can use whatever you have!

Play with sidewalk chalk. Draw pictures of what you see outside or what a toddler is interested in.

Paint with water outside. Fill a cup with water and give toddlers a brush to "paint" the driveway or sidewalk.

Story-telling and conversation are great ways to build a toddler's literacy. This activity will also teach them about emotions.

- Talk with toddlers about the different feelings they are experiencing. Try saying, "You seem angry right now." You may retell about times they felt upset.
- Try describing what toddlers are doing while they do it. In this simple activity, label what a toddler is doing. You may say, "I see you stacked these blocks." Begin adding questions to spur additional thoughts, such as "Which size block will you use next?"

Use play dough to make shapes or letters or just squish it to build finger muscles. [Watch a video](#) about how to make play dough. Then make some together!

Use puppets to create imaginative scenarios. You can model different emotions for each puppet.



Things to Think About

Notes

Did you and the toddler have fun playing? How did you know you and the toddler were having fun?

Which activity did the toddler enjoy the most?

Was there any activity that the toddler did not like? How would you change it?

What did you learn about the toddler?

How did you praise the toddler for trying a new activity and for positive behaviors? What other ways can you encourage them?

What other ideas do you have?



Quick Tip!

Children who play outdoors regularly:

- Become fitter and leaner
- Develop stronger immune systems
- Have more active imaginations
- Have lower stress levels
- Play more creatively
- Have greater respect for themselves and others

• For physical activity ideas visit:

colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/physical-activity

Follow this checklist to keep toddlers 9–18 months old safe and healthy.

- Make your home a safe place for toddlers to move and explore.
- Block off dangerous areas like stairs and electrical outlets.
- Move dangerous items such as household cleaners, medicines and sharp tools like knives and scissors out of reach.
- Look at the world from a toddler's point of view. Understand that at this age, they will get into everything and anything.
- Make sure that any furniture a child could climb on is securely fastened to the wall and/or floor.
- Keep toy chests, car trunks and washer/dryer doors closed when not in use.
- Don't let children put small things in their mouths.
- Keep plastic shopping bags and trash bags away from children.
- Install lid locks on all toilets. Keep the lids closed.

Act fast if you think a child has been poisoned!

Call the Poison Control Centers at 1.800.222.1222.

- As you continue to introduce solid foods and share more of the foods you eat, help toddlers learn to accept and like healthy foods. This routine will set the foundation for healthy eating. It may help prevent obesity, chronic diseases and oral health problems. Supervise children when they are eating and drinking. Make sure food is cut small enough for children to eat.
- Teach toddlers to chew their food fully before swallowing.
- After a child's first tooth comes in, use a baby toothbrush with soft bristles and a small head. Put a smear (size of a grain of rice) of fluoride toothpaste on the toothbrush and brush all sides of the child's teeth.

Being a caregiver is hard work. There are plenty of ups and downs. Some days are more stressful than others. Stress can affect you as a caregiver. You might be more impatient with a child, become frustrated more easily or be distracted. When you are stressed, it can be hard to be available to support children. Don't let it impact your caregiving. For tips on how to manage stress see page 35.

Toddlers: Children Ages 19–36 Months Old

Growth & Learning - Toddlers are developing independence. They have a stronger sense of self-awareness. They understand that they are separate individuals from their caregivers. They are learning how to consider others' perspectives. More and more, they insist on trying tasks by themselves and exerting control over their environment. They have a growing interest in books, art, toys and other activities.

Their communication and understanding of the world around them is growing every day. Toddlers' ability to remember things increases greatly around this age. They begin to recall and categorize things and people. Because of their improved memory, they can hold ideas in their minds for a longer time. As a result, you may see an increase in pretend play at this age.

Brain Builders

Between the ages of two and three years old, you will see improvements in children's thinking, memory and learning skills. They may be able to tell stories now. They may remember events or people from the recent past. Exposing toddlers to many different experiences where they can practice new skills is a great way to strengthen and form new connections. These opportunities will support readiness for school later.^{vii} Toddlers learn best through repetition, so continuing serve-and-return interactions is a good way to strengthen their brain (see pages 7 and 38 for more information).^{viii}

What Toddlers May Be Doing

What You Can Do To Support Toddlers

Toddlers may pedal a tricycle, climb up a ladder or walk backwards a few feet.

Play games that require physical actions, like rolling, throwing, kicking or chasing balls.

Toddlers may begin to make comparisons between themselves and other kids. For example, they may say that another child “has brown hair like me.”

Recognize when children identify their size, hair color or gender. Provide opportunities to interact with other children of diverse cultures, ethnicities and abilities.

Toddlers may insist on zipping up a jacket alone. They may say, “Do it myself!” when a parent tries to help.

Allow toddlers time to do things for themselves. Acknowledge their actions.

Toddlers may know 300-1000 words.
*NOTE: Children who speak a language other than English at home or are English-language learners may mix words from different languages in the same sentence. Because they are learning two languages, they may seem to be gaining vocabulary at a slightly slower rate than children who speak one language.

Make room for toddlers to participate when telling stories and singing songs.
*NOTE: If a child speaks a language other than English at home or is an English-language learner, you can help when they mix words from different languages by repeating what they say using all words in the same language.

Older toddlers are beginning to apply the rules of language and may make mistakes. For example, you may hear them say, “I goed outside.”

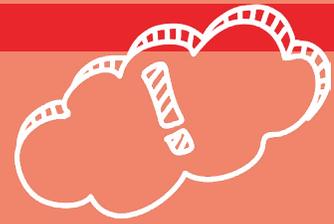
You can expand on toddlers’ understanding of the rules of language by restating incorrect statements in a correct format. For example, when a child says, “I goed outside,” you can respond with, “Yes, you went outside.”

Toddlers may put all the soft stuffed animals in one pile and all the hard plastic toy animals in another pile. They may label the piles “soft animals” and “hard animals.”

Encourage sorting and matching by pointing out similarities and differences. For example, you can say, “This piece is blue. Let’s find another piece that is blue.”

Toddlers may initiate and follow through with some personal care routines like drinking from a cup without spilling much or helping set the table for lunch.

Provide tools, like a stool at the sink or a coat hook within reach, to allow toddlers to begin to do things on their own. Help only when needed.



Remember

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Play and exploration are cornerstones of early learning. Play helps children learn, use their imaginations and express themselves creatively. During play children can use their senses to try new things, make predictions and solve problems. These types of activities build core life skills that will give children a strong start as they enter kindergarten.



Activities Toddlers Enjoy

Play a game with various sorting rules. Try sorting objects by size, shape or color. You can increase the challenge of this task by having them match items that are not alike. Example: all the yellow items go in the red bucket and all the red items go in the yellow bucket. This activity will help stretch toddlers' attention, memory and regulation.

Play the "Mirror Game." Stand across from a toddler and copy their moves like a mirror or have them copy your moves. "Follow the leader" or "Head, shoulders, knees and toes" are other great renditions of this activity. These games build memory, attention and self-regulation.

Create or use instruments with toddlers. Create instruments with cans or jars. You can add rice or other fillers to closed jars with secured lids glued shut for children to shake. Listen to music and dance with toddlers.

Let children know that books are special. This will encourage language and literacy skills.

- Tell a story or read a book to toddlers throughout the day.
- After you've finished reading, ask children to tell you all they remember about the story.
- Encourage children to make up and tell stories. Ask them to repeat a story you have read.
- Ask children to describe what they see happening in pictures in books.

Create a special corner of the room where you can read to toddlers. You may enjoy crafting a themed spot, such as an island getaway complete with fake palm branches or a starry galaxy with hanging paper stars. In this special space, you can instill a sense of wonder in children while you are reading together. Make sure to ask them questions about what is happening in the story.

During snack time, have children count how many pieces of food are on their plate. If number sense is still developing, work with them on distinguishing "one" item from "more than one" item. Next, begin counting with them up to ten.

Use puppets to create an imaginative conversation. Model taking turns in conversation and create imaginative scenarios to introduce new and unusual vocabulary. Comment and ask questions about what they are doing and their environment. Repeat and add new vocabulary to their comments. Model the correct use of words. Label objects.

Outside water play is fun and developmentally appropriate at this age. Fill up a big container or bucket with water. Let toddlers play with bowls, cups, sponges or other toys in the water. Make sure to pour out standing water after play.

Help toddlers begin to explore all they can do physically. For example, give them opportunities to ride tricycles or balance bikes. Let them kick and throw balls and practice skills like hopping. They may begin to practice new skills during playground visits.

Things to Think About



Notes

Did you and the toddler have fun playing? How did you know you and the toddler were having fun?

Which activity did the toddler enjoy the most?

Was there any activity that the toddler did not like? How would you change it?

What did you learn about the toddler?

How did you praise the toddler for trying a new activity and for positive behaviors? What other ways can you encourage them?

What other ideas do you have? What ideas can the toddler suggest?

Quick Tip!

School readiness begins with health! Ideas for children to have a healthy, active life:

- Eat five fruits and vegetables a day.
- Keep screen time down (like using computers, TV or video games).
- Get one or more hours of physical activity a day.
- Drink zero sugar-sweetened drinks. Replace soda, sports drinks, and fruit juice with milk or water.



Follow this checklist to keep toddlers 19–36 months old safe and healthy.

- You may be looking forward to changing your last diaper very soon. No need to rush!
- Toddlers are expressing their likes and dislikes at this age. This may be especially true when it comes to food. If a toddler is picky, don't limit the menu to only foods that they like. Continue to offer new foods and allow them to explore at their own pace. It takes children eight to ten times of trying new foods to decide if they like it or not.
- Help establish positive eating habits by providing healthy foods throughout the day. Always have water available. Be a role model as children try new and healthy foods.
- Starting healthy media habits now is important. Unhealthy habits are hard to change when children are older. If you do choose to introduce digital media at this age, choose high-quality programming or apps. Use them together and turn the TV off at meals and engage in back-and-forth conversations instead.
- Teach children about safety rules when out in the community. Practice looking both ways before crossing the street, crossing at the crosswalk and walking on the sidewalk. Encourage them to walk slowly and stay with you. Make sure they always wear a helmet when riding a bike or scooter.



Learning more about how children grow will help you as a caregiver. This includes better understanding what children can and can't do at different developmental ages. You should also learn how to support their progress. It's important to learn about realistic expectations of children from reliable, trusted sources on child development.

Preschoolers: Children Ages 3–5 Years Old

Growth & Learning - Between ages three and five, preschool-aged children are building skills that prepare them for kindergarten and beyond. Their bodies and brains are continuing to develop. They will actively explore their world. Their learning can expand across subjects, including math and science. Serve-

and-return interactions are still helpful.^{ix} Activities that build new skills contribute to a solid foundation that will support preschoolers' success when they enter kindergarten. Exploring safe environments with trusted adults is important at this age.

Brain Builders

During the preschool period, the child's brain goes through important changes and growth.^x Play a wide variety of games (educational, musical, physical, social) with preschoolers to build strong learning skills. In order to optimize what preschoolers are learning, target skills that they cannot yet complete independently. Select tasks or activities that are a little bit harder than they can solve by themselves, but which they can successfully complete with some support from you. Examples might include puzzles, riding a bike, throwing a ball or preparing a simple recipe together. Breakdown harder tasks into smaller and simpler tasks. Remain positive and encouraging. Ask questions, especially open-ended questions that start with what, how or why. Questions will help them maintain focus and think through how to solve tasks. Activities like these are great ways to improve how children approach learning and focus their attention. This builds the foundation for a strong start in school.

What Preschoolers May Be Doing

What You Can Do To Support Preschoolers

Children may begin to handle impulses and feelings more effectively. For example, children this age can take deep breaths, distract themselves or problem solve. They can also follow simple rules, routines and directions.

Establish, explain and model simple rules—like a bedtime routine—in ways they can understand. Use pictures to help support routines.

Children may become upset when care is being provided by someone other than their primary caregiver.

Primary caregivers can create a short ritual around “goodbye time.” However, when it is time to depart, caregivers should leave quickly. When the caregiver is gone, provide a comfort object such as a blanket, book or family photo.

Children may engage in more complex movements such as hopping, galloping, balancing on one leg, bouncing balls, climbing or swinging (including upside down!).

Incorporate opportunities for physical activity every day, both inside and outside of your home. Try dancing, jumping jacks or creating obstacle courses to support these activities.

Children may pretend to read and write in scribbles or symbols. They may also recognize words that rhyme and the letters in their own name.

Keep reading to children. Point out signs and words on items at home and in the classroom, neighborhood or store. Encourage them to write down letters they see in the world around them.

Children may build math skills. They may be getting better at counting and sorting objects by color and size.

Take advantage of every opportunity to count, group and order objects and materials. Ask children which object is bigger or smaller.

Children may think through problems and apply strategies for solving them.

Ask children questions that apply to real problems and talk with them about different approaches to solving problems.

Children may observe nature and make predictions about natural events. For example, they may explain how seeds grow or how you should care for animals.

Encourage children to ask questions and seek answers by exploring and thinking about what they learn.

Children may use imagination and creativity. They may express ideas in many ways. They might move to music they like or draw stories.

Provide children with examples of diverse music at home or in other places in your community.

Dual-language learners may be starting to speak and understand a lot more in English. They may be answering “yes” or “no” to certain questions or repeating simple words in songs.

Continue speaking to children in their home language. The more they understand in their home language, the easier learning a second language will be.



Remember

Children develop at their own pace. Each child is unique. Children of the same age may have different abilities but still be developing typically for their age. If you think that a child might need further evaluation of their development, speak with the child's parents as soon as possible. Parent can contact their child's doctor or contact [Child Find](#).

Play and exploration are cornerstones of early learning. Play helps children learn, use their imaginations and express themselves creatively. During play children can use their senses to try new things, make predictions and solve problems. These types of activities build core life skills that will give children a strong start as they enter kindergarten.



When giving positive feedback start with:

- "I'm so appreciative that you..."
- "It really pleases me when you..."
- "You have really learned how to..."
- "You must feel proud of yourself for..."
- "You've done a wonderful job at..."

For more resources and strategies on social emotional learning visit bit.ly/SocialEmotionalStrategies.



Activities Preschoolers Enjoy

Role play with puppets or stuffed animals to help children practice problem solving. Playing through problem solving is a great way to help children think about solutions. This can be fun even when there is not an immediate problem. Prompt them to think critically about problems with questions such as, “What can we do to fix it?” When problems have been solved, ask them follow-up questions such as, “How did you know the solution to that problem?” or “How did you know the answer?” These questions help preschoolers use their memory and problem-solving skills.

Yoga is a fun activity to get children moving. Try working through a list of animal yoga poses for kids. (As one example, check out [Kids Yoga Stories Zoo Animals Yoga](#)). These poses require preschoolers to slow down, focus their attention and use whole body movement.

Have children act out a story. You can read the story to them or they can make one up. They could use their own drawings or paintings to tell the story.

“Simon says” is a great way for children to use their memory. They can also practice flexibility and response based on what Simon has said.

Try variations of “head, shoulders, knees and toes.” Try going fast or slow. Try changing the order of operations (shoulders, toes, knees and head). Try changing the rules on other games that preschoolers enjoy. When children shift to a new set of rules, they are using memory, attention and flexible thinking.

Sorting games continue to promote strong learning skills in preschoolers; however, in this stage, you can increase the complexity. Try using one rule for the first sorting activity (for example: sort by shape) and then change the rule (for example: sort by color or size).^{xi}

Have a variety of props available for imaginative play, such as toy food and plastic kitchenware to play “restaurant.” Also try allowing children to create their own props or even reimagine props (e.g., blocks can be used as pretend food).

Play a game in which you state a definition and preschoolers have to guess the word.^{xii} Anyone who is not playing waits for a chance to guess. Example: “What is a long orange plant that is eaten as a vegetable?” Answer: “Carrot!” This game helps preschoolers with core life skills. They work to remember and match characteristics to objects they know. This also promotes self-regulation, as they must wait for their turn to answer.

Using shaker eggs, clapping or stomping as you sing helps children hear the syllables in words. Add hand gestures to the song will help children understand the meaning of the words. Try creating songs to go along with their daily routines. Songs may be helpful during mealtime or during transitions. Sing songs in children’s home language.



Things to Think About

Notes

Did you and the preschooler have fun playing?
How did you know you and the preschooler were having fun?

Which activity did the preschooler enjoy the most?

Was there any activity that the preschooler did not like? How would you change it?

What did you learn about the preschooler?

How did you praise the preschooler for trying a new activity and for their positive behaviors? What other ways can you use to encourage them?

What other ideas do you have? What ideas can the preschooler suggest?



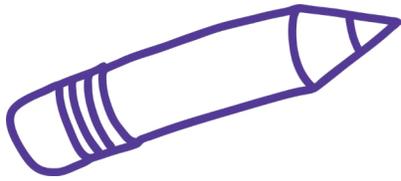
Follow this checklist to keep children 3 - 5 years old safe and healthy.

- Children need healthy fuel to keep the brain learning and body in motion! When children don't eat well they have a harder time learning. They also have more difficulty controlling disruptive behaviors. It's important to model a healthy attitude toward food. Try discussing food as a tool to provide energy for our bodies.
- Continue to offer a variety of foods, so children get a balance of the vitamins they need to grow.
- Allow children to serve themselves with the right serving size utensils. This gives children the ability to choose their own portion sizes. Their brains tell them when they are full or if they are hungry.
- If a child is a picky eater, continue offering new foods and previously rejected foods. It takes a child eight to ten times trying foods before they decide if they like it.
- Continue to eat together at regular meal times without distractions and screens, including television, phones and computers.
- Keep your home safe by keeping all medicines and cleaning supplies in containers with safety caps. Store them in a locked cabinet.

Nurture your own good self-esteem to support the children in your care. Good self-esteem means that you feel positive about yourself and have a healthy view of your abilities. When you feel positive about your abilities, you can cope better when things are stressful or don't go as planned.

Quick Tip!

Go explore your community! Go to a kids' recreational area, pool, park or playground and meet new children and families. Talk with children about what you will see. Name the things and people you will look for such as flowers, animals, bus riders or librarians. Talk with children about safety rules such as holding hands when you cross the street. Visit vroom.org for more brain-building daily activity ideas.



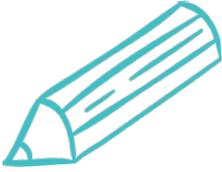
Notes

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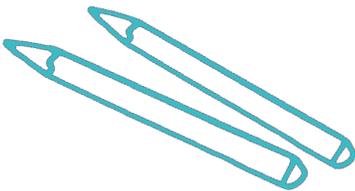




Notes



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Transition Supports



Transition is another way to think about changes that occur in a child's life. To make transitions successful, families and caregivers/educators need to share information. They also need to focus on supportive relationships and ensure consistency and stability. Children, families, caregivers and educators have increased understanding of new expectations when they

can practice adjusting to new environments. Helping children manage their feelings as they transition between different learning environments early in life can establish positive coping skills. These experiences will have far-reaching impacts beyond the early years. At any age, consider the following strategies to help children feel safe and supported during transitions.

Maintain Routines. From birth, children's days are filled with routines such as bedtime, mealtime and diapering. You can help children manage transitions by establishing predictable and familiar routines.

Be Responsive. When babies and children make attempts to communicate that they need help, respond as quickly as possible. Provide your response in a predictable and consistent manner. Responding to children's needs in a timely and consistent way helps to develop secure relationships. Strong relationships are critical during transitions. Secure relationships with a familiar adult will make it easier for children to explore more comfortably and build attachments in new environments with new caregivers and friends. Additionally, secure relationships help build children's ability to communicate their needs to adults and peers. They also help children believe that others will respond to their needs.

Use Visuals. Children's ability to understand and use language can impact how they transition. Knowing children's language skill level and the language(s) they speak is helpful to understand how to support them. Using visual aids and prompts can help all children, not just those with limited language skills. Visuals will help children better prepare for the changes coming next. Change can be easier to accept when we know what is coming. For example, show children a picture of their new classroom or school. Use visual schedules with older children to illustrate what's happening during the day.

Be a Role Model. You can help children develop their own coping skills by modeling your own positive social behavior during times of stress. Label when you feel stressed, overwhelmed and scared for children. Model the use of words to describe feelings. Share a time you were scared of something new and what you did to feel more comfortable. Model strategies to handle stress and manage your own emotions and behavior. Show choices children can copy such as taking a walk together, talking to a friend or listening to calming music.



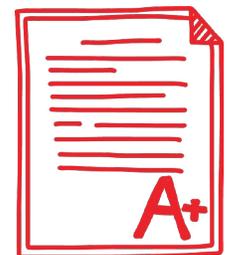
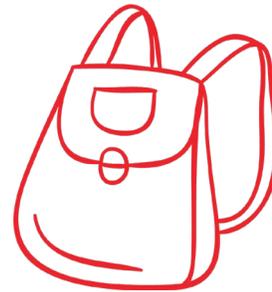
Books To Support Kindergarten Transitions

- Place Called Kindergarten by Jessica Harper
- Countdown to Kindergarten by Alison McGhee
- David Goes to School by David Shannon
- First Day Jitters by Julie Danneberg
- Froggy Goes to School by Jonathan London
- I Am Too Absolutely Small for School by Lauren Child
- Kindergarten Rocks! by Katie Davis
- Look Out Kindergarten, Here I come! by Nancy Carlson
- Mae's First Day of School by Kate Berube
- Off to Kindergarten by Tony Johnston
- ¡Qué nervios! El primer día de escuela by Julie Danneberg
- School's First Day of School by Adam Rex
- Splat the Cat by Rob Scotton
- The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn
- Un Beso en Mi Mano by Audrey Penn
- Welcome to Kindergarten by Anne Rockwell
- Wemberly Worried by Kevin Henkes
- Look Out Kindergarten, Here I come! / "¡Prepárate, Kindergarten, Allá voy!" by Nancy Carlson
- Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten by Joseph Slate and Ashley Wolf



Quick Tip!

We all feel happier when we know what comes next. [Learn how](#) routines build strong relationships and help children learn.



A few ideas on stories that talk about diversity and inclusion:

- All Are Welcome, written by Alexandra Penfold and illustrated by Suzanne Kaufman
- A Is For Activist and Counting on Community, written and illustrated by Innosanto Nagara
- Lovely, written and illustrated by Jess Hong
- Last Stop on Market Street, written by Matt De La Pena and illustrated by Christian Robinson



Visit Colorado's [Early Learning and Developmental Guidelines](#) for more information on how to support children during transitions.

Taking Care of Yourself

Adopted from Head Start

Remember to make time for your own self-care. This way, you are better prepared to meet the needs of the children in your care. Here are some tips to help with stress.

1. Know What Stress Looks and Feels Like for You

When you are stressed, it is easy to react before even realizing you have reached a point of stress. In order to successfully reduce your levels of stress and the impact it has on yourself and the children in your care, you must first recognize your stressors or “primary pressure points.”

Think about:

- What is stress? What causes me stress? How do I know when I have reached a point of stress? How does stress make me feel?
- Did you know that your thoughts can impact your feelings and behavior? Stress comes from our perception of a situation. The actual situation may be perceived as more or less stressful to different people. Our perception plays a role in stress.

Stress may impact you when things feel out of control or do not have an end in sight.

2. Take Care of Yourself

Sometimes you can make choices about how you spend your time that will prevent or reduce stress in your life. These strategies can help you avoid stress or cope with stress. If you take care of yourself, you will be in a better position to take care of others!

- Communicate with other care providers or families to learn new ideas and strategies for caring for children.
- Make sure to maintain your physical health by eating well and exercising. Caring for children requires strength and endurance.
- Eating healthy meals will boost your energy. Try to get lots of protein (fish, chicken, beans and cheese) and good carbohydrates (multigrain bread, nuts) as well as fruits and vegetables.
- Babies take cues from those around them, so your mood is very important. If you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed or upset, try taking some calming breaths. If this doesn't work, ask another caring adult to cover you so you can take a short break if possible.

- 
- If there is no other adult around, do not feel that you must continue caring for an infant or toddler while extremely stressed. It is better to put the baby in a safe place (such as a crib) and take a break for a few minutes, giving yourself enough space to feel more calm and regulated. Then, return to caring for the baby.
 - To keep your stress level down, make sure to create time in your day to relax. This might be a bath when you are done caring for children or when children are being supervised by another caring adult. It might be a walk to the store or a nap.
 - To minimize possible stress during feeding time, make sure you are familiar with each child's eating patterns and preferences. Communicate regularly with parents to make sure everyone is on the same page.
 - To help promote easier transitions (e.g., to naptime), develop routines so that children know what to expect. Stick to these routines. Select calming activities to use during your bedtime routines that will progressively relax the child's body and mind.

Belly breathing or deep breathing exercises are a proven way to reduce stress. Try this technique while standing or seated in a chair:

1. Place your arms and hands at your side, relaxed. Alternately, place one or both hands on your belly.
 2. Close your eyes.
 3. Focus on your belly. Feel the lower part of your stomach. Imagine a small balloon inside.
 4. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Imagine the balloon inflating. Hold a few seconds.
 5. Slowly exhale through your mouth. Imagine the balloon gently deflating. Blow out of your mouth as if you were blowing out a candle.
 6. Repeat at least three times.
- 

3. Develop a Stress Action Plan

Learning to manage stress in a healthy way may not come naturally. When starting any new behavior, it is important to develop a strategy for using it ahead of time in order to increase the chances of using the new behavior successfully. Make a plan for change. Think about one thing that causes you stress and one sign you know you are stressed. Then list a technique you will use for dealing with your stress in a healthy way.

Example: When (my stressor happens: the baby cries for longer than 5 minutes) and I begin to feel (sign of stress: my heart race), I will (technique to use: breathe deeply to calm down).

Seeing a therapist or speaking with a trained professional may be helpful. Call the Colorado Crisis line at 1.844.493.8255 or text "TALK" to 38255 for support and counseling for yourself or a loved one.

Resources for Families and Caregivers/Educators

It is essential first and foremost that your family has what they need to ensure a positive, safe and well-resourced environment for you and the children you are caring for. There are many resources available in Colorado to support you, whatever your needs may be.

Community Connectors

- Call [Colorado's 2-1-1](#) phone line for a confidential and multilingual service connecting people to vital resources across the state. No matter where you live in Colorado, you can find information about resources in your local community.
- **Adelante Network Navegadoras Comunitarias (720.507.7079)** is a warmline that connects individuals with resources, services and communications from different agencies and organizations.

Food and Nutrition

- [Cooking Matters](#) helps parents and caregivers struggling with limited food budgets learn how to shop for and cook healthy, affordable meals. [Exploring Foods Together](#) has activities for child care providers to do with children in their care. Activities are available in English and Spanish.
- The statewide **Food Resource Hotline (855.855.4626)** is a bilingual toll-free number that connects Coloradans to needed food and nutrition resources. It is a free “one-stop” resource that offers geographically-based referrals to both public and private food assistance programs across the state.
- Visit the [Colorado Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\) Program](#) to learn if you are eligible and sign up for food assistance, nutrition education, breastfeeding counseling and pumps and the support you need to keep your family healthy.



Physical and Mental Health

- Use the **Children's Hospital Colorado ParentSmart Healthline (720.777.0123)** for free healthcare advice from registered nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Consult the [ChildrensMD mobile app](#) when babies are sick. You will find information that can help you make smart decisions on the level of care the child might need. You can also learn how to provide speedy symptom relief for minor illnesses or injuries you can manage on your own.

- Call the **Colorado Crisis Line** at **1.844.493.TALK (8255)** or text **“TALK” to 38255**. This is a 24/7/365 support line for anyone affected by a mental health, substance use or emotional crisis. All calls are connected to a mental health professional, who will provide immediate support and connections to further resources.
- The **Colorado Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (844-CO-4-Kids)** is available 24 hours a day, every day. Don't hesitate to call and get help.
- Anyone witnessing a child in a life-threatening situation should call **911** immediately.
- **Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultation**: The goal of the program is to help adults support children's social-emotional development and to identify early in a child's life any concerns that could lead to greater challenges in the future. To learn more about the ECMH Consultation and how it can benefit children and families contact your **local** Early Childhood Council.
- Know how to contact your local **Child Find** agency if you suspect a child has a need for early intervention or special education services.
- The **Denver Children's Advocacy Center** offers a safe space for people to come together and learn about a range of topics with people who may share similar experiences. We provide supports for families experiencing physical or sexual abuse or neglect. In addition, our team of trauma-specialized therapists is here to support families suffering from the stress of their immigration situation. Contact Katt Lovejoy at **720.974.7234** for more information.

Family Support and Education

- Visit **SafeCare® Colorado** for a free, voluntary parent support program for parents and caregivers with children ages five and under who need or desire extra support to keep their families safe and healthy. Parent support providers help you build on your existing skills in the areas of parent-child interactions, home safety and child health.
- Find out if you qualify for **Parents as Teachers (PAT)**, a free, voluntary parent education and family support program serving families like yours, from pregnancy until your child enters kindergarten.
- Learn about the **Nurse-Family Partnership**, a free, voluntary program that pairs first-time, low-income mothers with highly trained nurses.
- **Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters** (HIPPY) is an early childhood education program. It works with families in the comfort of their own homes to support parents by making sure their children are ready for kindergarten.
- Connect with comprehensive, coordinated services at **Family Resource Centers**. They provide a safe, accessible place for your family. Programs at each center help you strengthen your family and become more self-reliant. The services are tailored to the culture, resources and needs of the community, and focus on building on the strengths of each family and individual. View this list for **Family Support Programs** in your local area.

Caregiver/Educator Support and Education

- [Expanding Quality in Infant and Toddler Care](#) (EQIT): In many communities, a low-cost, interactive class about infant and toddler caregiving called EQIT is available to formal and informal caregivers. EQIT teaches you about infant and toddler development, your important role in their lives and how to best care for them so that they can grow and learn. Infants and toddlers thrive in responsive relationships—with YOU!
- [Providers Advancing School Outcomes](#) (PASO) training program is a rigorous 15-week, 120-hour training program where informal child care providers gain the skills and knowledge to apply for the Child Development Associate and elevate their childcare career to a whole new level.
- The Colorado Shines [Professional Development Information System](#) (PDIS) is a one-stop online resource for training related to early care and learning. PDIS offers a broad array of e-learning courses addressing all aspects of child development, health and safety and quality instruction. Classes are available for informal and formal child care providers. Many classes are available in Spanish.
- Contact your local Early Childhood Council (ECC) for resources for support. Colorado has 34 Early Childhood Councils, which act as hubs in their communities to improve and sustain the availability, accessibility, capacity and quality of early childhood services for children and families throughout the state. If you are interested in learning more about the support your council offers, visit [this website](#) to locate your council's Early Childhood Council.

Learning Materials

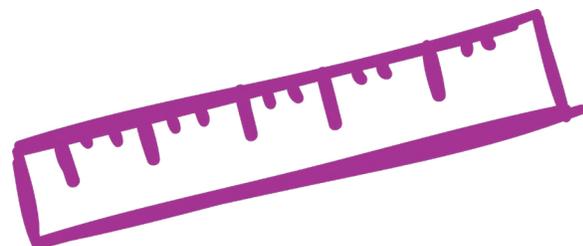
- Sign-up for [Bright by Text](#) to get free activities, games and resources on your cell phone. Messages are targeted to specific child ages and include information on child development, language and early literacy, health and safety, and behavioral tips.
- Visit [vroom.org](#) for more brain-building daily activity ideas that are organized by age. Vroom Tips™ help you do more with your shared moments. Add learning to mealtime, bath time, bedtime or anytime with 1,000+ fun, free activities.
- Check out Zero to Three for [parenting resources](#) that are based on research. The topics range from potty-training to screen time.
- Learn how to nurture and respond to children's healthy development and [common behaviors related to sexual development](#).
- Review the [Bright Futures Activity Book](#). It provides a fun, informative and interactive overview of the 10 Bright Futures themes that can be explored together by children and their caregivers. Available in English and Spanish.
- Visit the [Colorado State Library](#) website for resources to support child literacy skills.



Quick Tip!

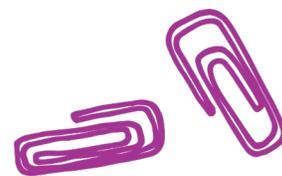
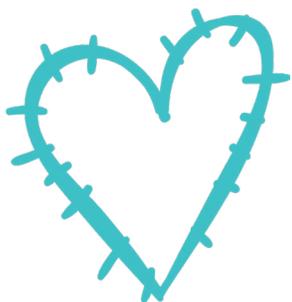
All children misbehave or engage in behaviors that are challenging for adults. How you handle a child's misbehavior can make a big difference in how that child behaves throughout their life. Treating children with kindness and respect will help them treat others with kindness and respect. You are modeling positive relationships. Tips:

- Try to understand the child's behavior. Listen to the child.
- Validate the child's feelings. Let them know you understand.
- Set clear expectations and limits. Enforce them with kindness and firmness.
- Redirect the child to other activities.
- Praise and encourage the behavior you want to see.
- Respond to the child's needs (e.g., almost all children misbehave when hungry or tired).
- Remain calm.
- Don't expect children to be perfect. Mistakes are wonderful learning opportunities!
- Model appropriate behavior— including saying sorry if you need to.



Quick Tip!

Infants need nurturing, sensitive and responsive caregiving. What that looks like is tuning in and noticing a baby's attempts to communicate with you. Then, responding in a warm and consistent way. The quality of infant relationships is heavily dependent upon the caregiver's physical and mental well-being. This shapes the basis for all future relationships. Learn more about serve-and-return interactions [here](#).



Important Considerations for Caregivers:

When caring for another family's child please consider the following information and business practices.

The Basics

- Gather emergency contact information for each child. Create a plan for children with health needs, such as medications, allergies, dietary restrictions or other concerns. Have a plan for medical emergencies.
- Ensure that all hazardous items (weapons, alcohol, medications, etc.) are locked up and inaccessible to children.
- Create an emergency evacuation plan and select alternative pick-up locations.
- Discuss the type of guidance strategies that will be used with the children. Ensure that no corporal punishment or harsh discipline is allowed.
- Develop a plan for providing meals and snacks, including who will be supplying the food.
- Create a schedule for the children in your care. Find examples of child care schedules at bit.ly/CareSchedule.

How to Become a Qualified Exempt Provider

If you are providing care for a relative or family friend, and you are exempt from licensing you may be qualified for child care assistance payment. You could become an approved Qualified Exempt (QE) provider with the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). For example, if you wish to be the child care provider for a friend or relative who is approved to receive CCCAP benefits, you may not need to apply for a child care license. Instead, you can apply to become a QE provider with CCCAP, and receive a reduced rate for watching the family's child(ren). In

order to become an approved QE provider, you will need to complete the application process. This includes passing the CBI and FBI fingerprint background checks. It also includes passing background checks for child abuse, neglect and other crimes. If you are interested in becoming a QE provider, please [contact](#) your county department of human/social services for more details. To care for more than four non-related children, you must seek a child care license in Colorado. To learn more about the process, please visit the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood [website](#).

Child Care Licensing

To start your own child care business, consider becoming a licensed child care provider. Start by [learning more](#) at the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood. Colorado Association of Family Child Care (CAFCC) is another place to [learn more](#) about licensing and support for caregivers. The type of license a child care provider has determines the ages of children that can be served, how many children can be served and how many staff are required



for each group of children. These limitations are necessary to ensure the health, safety and well-being of the children. Becoming a licensed provider means you would have access to more opportunities, like grants. Here is a [list](#) of capital-related funding sources.

To apply to be a Family Child Care Home, review [this guide](#).



Quick Tip!

When children are safe and their relationships are strong, the care is high-quality, no matter the setting! (bit.ly/RelationshipsVideo)

Colorado Shines - Quality Rating and Improvement System

Many states have implemented a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to help define quality for licensed child care programs. [Colorado Shines](#) is the official name of Colorado's Quality Rating and Improvement System. A Colorado Shines rating is a guarantee to families that your program is licensed, in good standing and meets basic health and safety standards.

Colorado Shines rates the quality of Colorado's early learning programs, on a scale of 1 to 5, based on how well the program:

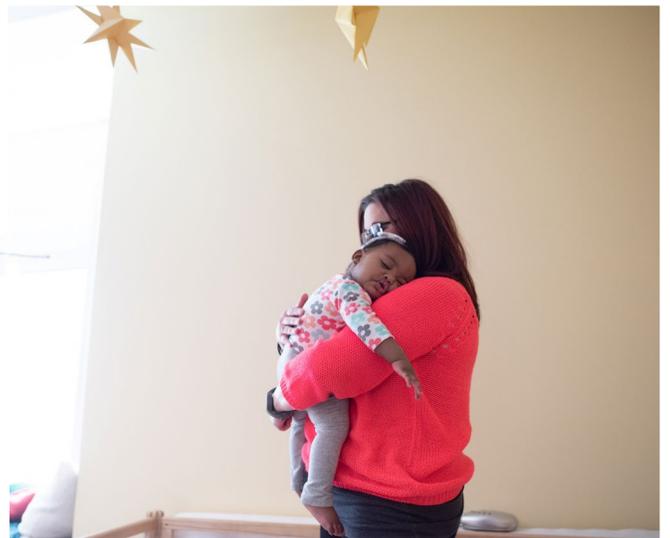
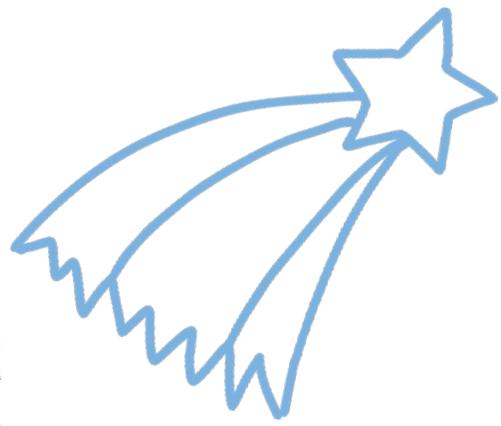
- Supports children's health and safety
- Ensures staff are well-trained and effective
- Provides a supportive learning environment that teaches children new skills
- Helps parents become partners in their child's learning
- Demonstrates good leadership and business practices

Once programs become licensed, they will receive support from Colorado Shines Quality Improvement Coaches located at Early Childhood Councils to improve their quality rating.

This rating system also influences the reimbursement rates for Colorado's child care subsidy program or Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP).

For additional support contact your local [Early Childhood Council](#). Your local Council will likely have the most up-to-date information on funding or professional development opportunities for early learning professionals in your community.





Acknowledgements

[Family, Friend and Neighbor \(FFN\) Network](#)

[Head Start](#)

[Zero to Three](#)

[Vroom](#)

[Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment \(CDPHE\)](#)

[Growing Readers Together](#)

[Valley Settlement](#)

[Denver Early Childhood Council](#)

[Harvard's Center on the Developing Child](#)

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For questions or more information contact the [Office of Early Childhood](#) at 1.800.799.5876.



Endnotes

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