

- ✓ The early years from birth to five
- ✓ Personal, social and emotional development
- ✓ Communication, language and literacy

**PARENT  
KNOW  
HOW**

Your child's  
**learning and  
development**

**0-5**

department for  
**education and skills**

# AT A GLANCE

## Helping your child develop through the early years

- Learning happens all the time for babies and young children. And it's even better when it's shared with a caring and trusted adult.
- Between birth and the age of five, your baby goes through various stages of development – looking and communicating; sitting, standing and exploring; moving, shaking and playing; walking, talking and pretending. From three to five, your child is entitled to free, early education through the Foundation Stage.
- Being a strong child isn't just about physical strength. It's also about inner strength and being capable, confident and self-assured.
- When you spend time talking and listening to your baby or young child, you're also developing their confidence and abilities in communicating.
- Toddlers become creative through exploration and discovery as they experiment.
- For babies and young children, being central to someone else's life and being cared for is really important for their physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing.
- Between three and five-years-old, as your child becomes more independent, they enter the Foundation Stage. This is when children are entitled to free early education in a range of settings such as nurseries, pre-schools, schools and playgroups.
- When your child constantly asks 'Why?', they're also gathering useful information and developing their knowledge bank.
- Being creative helps children to adapt and respond to a world that's changing rapidly.

### Did you know?

**Being brought up in an atmosphere of love and fun and feeling safe and secure is the greatest gift you can give your child. And it's free!**

# Making the most of time with your child

Even before birth, babies are learning. They're aware of the songs you sing and the music you play while they're still in the womb. And from the moment they're born, every waking minute brings new experiences. Their knowledge and understanding grow as they develop through childhood into independent adults.

Learning happens all the time for babies and young children. And it's even better when it's shared with a caring and trusted adult. You can help them develop the creativity and confidence that will stand them in good stead through life.

Every parent wants the best for their child. You're the most important person in their life and crucial to their wellbeing. Your listening, understanding, playing and love is already nurturing them. But maybe you'd like to do more?

This booklet has some ideas on how to build on what you do now, so you can make the most of your time with your baby or young child – and support their development as they grow. You'll be surprised how much of it you already do, without even realising it.

You'll see:

- how quickly your child develops and how everyday things help them do so
- that speaking, listening and having fun with your child helps them develop all kinds of skills
- that different environments – such as playgroups, libraries, and nurseries – give babies, young children and parents plenty of opportunities to enjoy and learn together.

## You can make a difference

In the years between birth and three, your baby will grow rapidly into a young child. When you think about it, it's amazing how far they develop. In just three short years they'll go from being completely dependant on you to being able to move and communicate by themselves – and be totally independent for short spells.

From three onwards, they're entitled to free early education – and you'll see them develop further in leaps and bounds. As a parent, you'll always have a lot to offer them. And in these early years your support is invaluable. It gives them the start they need.

They look about, watch, notice and react to the things around them, and communicate with people they see.

## Sitters, standers and explorers

From eight to 18 months, babies start exploring their environment with a sense of purpose. They know where they're heading and why! Being better at getting around and developing their language means they can find out and understand more about their world.

## Movers, shakers and players

From 18 to 24 months, toddlers start to become more independent and enjoy moving about, communicating and learning through play.

## Walkers, talkers and pretenders

From 24 to 36 months, young children become much more able to get around, talk and pretend. They show more self-confidence and skill in making relationships with other people.

## The Foundation Stage

From three until the end of the reception year at primary school, children grow, develop and learn rapidly. They choose their friends and develop their own preferred ways of learning.

## The five stages of development

Between birth and the age of 5, your baby goes through various stages of development.

### Heads up, lookers and communicators

During their first eight months or so, young babies react to people and situations with their whole bodies.

# Aspects of development

For **birth to three**, there are broadly four aspects of development. Each has its own important skills and character development which everyone needs if they're to live comfortably and independently around other people.

From **birth to three** they need to develop as a:

- strong child (capable and confident)
- skilful communicator
- competent learner
- healthy child.

When it comes to the **Foundation Stage** including full-time education in reception classes, children are learning through play and developing the skills that they will need for all future learning. They are making sense of the world and dealing with the challenges and experiences that life brings them.

The **Foundation Stage** has six learning areas:

- personal, social and emotional development
- communication, language and literacy
- mathematical development
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

All three and four-year-olds are entitled to free part-time early education in a Foundation Stage setting.

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## Birth to three

### A 'strong child' (capable and confident)

Being a strong child isn't just about physical strength. It's also about inner strength and being capable, confident and self-assured. The early years of your child's life are really important for this. Babies and young children need your support as they begin their journey of self-discovery. They need to know you're always there for them, and to feel nurtured and cherished.

As a parent, you're the key person in your child's life. Giving them your respect, care and love is something that's second nature to you – but it also means that your child can develop a feeling of emotional safety, trust and a positive self-image.

By encouraging them to make their own decisions and explore opportunities, you're also helping them discover themselves and their capabilities.

**The most important thing you do for your child is to have fun and be happy, respecting them and enjoying these years together. It will have a lasting effect on them. They'll grow up more confident, more fulfilled and better able to get along with the people around them.**

### Did you know?

- Cuddling your baby or toddler may come naturally to you. But at the same time you're building a bond which will help when they start to develop other relationships. You're helping them feel safe and secure.
- Encouraging them to try new things lets them gain confidence and find out what they're capable of.
- When you praise your baby or toddler, you're building their delight in achievement and a sense of belonging that makes them feel secure when they're with other people.

### Remember...

**...showing your baby their reflection in a mirror – or letting your toddler choose what to wear in the morning will help them get to know themselves and become self-assured.**

## A skilful communicator

Communication is vital to all of us. Not just the spoken word but also gestures and body language. For babies and young children it begins with feeling close and safe with people. Quickly they find their own voice and start to express themselves – crying to let you know they need feeding, for instance. And they start to make sense of the sounds around them. You'll notice them learning the rules of conversation – listening and responding. It's not long before they realise it's important to pay attention if their communication is going to get them anywhere!

Being with other people – especially a key person like a parent – in warm and loving relationships gives children the very best start. That's when they start to develop social understanding, like:

- friendship
- empathy
- sharing emotions and experiences
- using language.

All children need to know there are boundaries. It gives them security and a sense of proportion that helps them live in society when they're an adult. Letting your child express themselves can seem a mixed blessing when you're stuck with a screaming toddler in a supermarket aisle. But it's all part of them finding out where the boundaries are.

## What about...

...playing a game of 'copycat' with your baby or toddler. Quite early on if you poke your tongue out at them they'll copy you. After a few months if you clap your hands they'll try to clap theirs too. When they make a sound and you echo it, watch their pleasure. They're learning how to have a conversation. And it's working!

## Did you know?

- When you spend time talking and listening to your baby or young child – about where they sleep, where they live, the noises they hear, the things they see – you're also developing their confidence and abilities in communicating.
- Babies and young children love to chat. Letting them talk on the phone extends their conversational skills, as they listen and respond.
- Taking the time to stop and look gives your child the opportunity to show you things they've noticed.
- Talking about what they've done that day builds on their ability to have a two-way conversation.

## A competent learner

Babies are learning right from birth. Even at just a few hours old they prefer to gaze at a pattern that looks like a human face rather than at another that doesn't. They can distinguish between things and show they like some better than others. By making these connections, they're beginning to make sense of the world around them.

Babies explore the world through:

- touch
- sight
- sound
- taste
- smell
- movement.

And as they do, they start to understand more. As they experience these things time and again, they start to imitate, explore and re-enact them. They become inventive in their play with different materials. Their imagination develops as they play 'pretend' – with gestures and actions, feelings and relationships, ideas and words. Toddlers become creative through exploration and discovery as they experiment. It's this ability to imagine, create and represent ideas that helps them share their thoughts and feelings as they develop – using drawings, words, movement, music, dance and imaginative play.

## What about...

...making your own play dough. In a pan, mix two cups of flour, one cup of salt, two cups of water, two tablespoons of cooking oil and one tablespoon of cream of tartar. Cook over a moderate heat. You'll end up with a 'play dough' which even the youngest of children will enjoy. Let them squeeze it between their fingers and manipulate it. They'll discover and explore it through their senses.

## Did you know?

- Reading a bedtime story to your child is helping them become a good learner.
- Repeating and imitating are important ways of learning for a baby or toddler. When they see you repeat actions or words, they imitate you. They're learning at the same time.
- If you put objects like corks, bottle tops, shells or strings of beads into a net washing powder bag so that your baby can shake and feel them, you'll pretty soon see them start to make choices about which ones they prefer.
- Babies and toddlers love playing with empty boxes. But at the same time, they're also developing their imagination.



## A healthy child

Being healthy means much more than having nutritious food and being illness-free. For babies and young children, being central to someone else's life and cared for is really important for their physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing. All these things affect how they are in the world – how they respond to other people and experiences. They help your child thrive.

Emotional wellbeing includes:

- warm and supportive relationships
- being able to express emotions such as joy and sadness, frustration and fear
- developing ways to cope with new, challenging or stressful situations.

Meeting children's physical needs helps them become healthy children. Growing and developing babies and young children who are physically well have the energy and enthusiasm to benefit from all the activities on offer. If they're tired, hungry or uncomfortable, they're less likely to do this. Let's face it, the idea of a wet nappy and an empty stomach isn't something any of us would relish.

Knowing when to ask for help, being protected and safe are all part of your child's wellbeing. In these conditions they can quickly become skilled in all kinds of movements – from running, to picking up and manipulating small objects. In time, they make their own healthy choices as they learn about their bodies and what they can do.

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## What about...

...making a picnic together. It could be in the garden, in the park, in your living room, even in your child's bedroom. Choose some healthy foods together and talk about why you're choosing them. Eat them anywhere that suits – outside, in the park, in your kitchen. Sharing is half the fun. And meanwhile your child is learning to combine healthy eating with pleasure.

### Did you know?

- Talking to your child about which foods are good for them – and letting them make their own healthy choices – helps them become independent and healthy.
- Letting them express their frustration or anger, explaining to them and offering suggestions, encourages them to develop their own solutions.
- Explaining why toys need to be put away helps them understand safety.

## The Foundation Stage

This period of your child's life, roughly between the ages of three and five, is really important in its own right – and in preparing them for later learning. Early years settings – such as nurseries, pre-schools, playgroups, reception classes and childminders – carefully design their activities so your child develops within the 'learning areas' in the Foundation Stage. All settings providing Government-funded free early education should monitor each child's progress, showing how they are progressing and working towards early learning goals.

### Remember...

**...much of what you already do with your child is helping their development through this stage. Research shows that where parents and early years settings work together, children do better. After all, you're their very first educator. And you understand your child better than anyone else.**

With your support your child can explore, develop and use their curiosity and imagination to help them make sense of the world in an environment where they feel safe and secure. They'll:

- practise skills
- build up ideas and concepts
- think creatively and imaginatively
- communicate with the people around them
- investigate and solve new challenges.

The **Foundation Stage** has six learning areas:

- personal, social and emotional development
- communication, language and literacy
- mathematical development
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

## Did you know?

We've divided children's learning and development into six areas. But in practice you'll find they all overlap. For instance, if you and your child use three garden canes and a sheet to make a wigwam, counting the canes as you go, then you make up a story together about it, your children are developing in a number of areas of learning at once. Your child is developing:

- personally and socially
- communication and language
- mathematically
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical abilities
- creativity.

**As you read through the next few pages, you'll see how the examples link to more than one area of development. When it comes to learning, there's no stopping them!**

## Personal, social and emotional development

Every young child needs to develop as a person, learn to get on with other people and begin to understand and express their emotions. It's something that affects all areas of their life. And it gives them the best opportunity for success in learning as they grow up.

It's about emotional wellbeing – knowing who they are and where they fit in. And feeling good about themselves. It's also about:

- developing respect for others
- being able to cope socially and interact with other people
- being ready and willing to learn.

Forming sound relationships with other children and adults gives your young child the security to develop in these areas. Learning to take turns and share, understanding right and wrong, recognising that people have different views and beliefs, which should be respected – all these lead to their knowing that that's how people get along together. It's all important for their future.

Having a thirst for learning, the confidence to try new activities and the ability to concentrate, will stand them in good stead through their school years and beyond.

### Did you know?

- Making sure your child's day has a routine will also give them a sense of security.
- Giving them small responsibilities at home – such as tidying toys with you, putting small things away – makes them feel valued and also teaches them about give and take.
- Being consistent in the way you talk to your child and handle situations means they can depend on you and feel safe.
- Understanding where they're coming from when things aren't going their way – and talking it through with them – helps your child understand other people's and their own emotions.

## What about...

...role play – like playing ‘pretend hospitals’ or having a ‘teddy bears’ tea party’ – with your child helps them explore their imagination and develop social, physical, language and literacy skills.

## Communication, language and literacy

This learning area builds a strong foundation for dealing with other people. It also helps children develop their imagination. And from there it's a small step to confidence and self-esteem. It's about developing skills to:

- communicate
- be able to speak and listen in different situations
- listen to books being read to them
- read simple words themselves
- write.

They're skills your child will develop as they express their needs and feelings, interact with other people and establish their own personality and identity. Being able to communicate means your child can take a fuller part in the world around them. You play a key role by:

- giving them opportunities and time to express themselves
- listening to them and showing an understanding of what they say
- encouraging their efforts
- reading to them, talking about the story and making up your own stories together.

Learning happens best when children are happy and confident. You can help build a love of rhymes, reading and books by having fun with them.

## Remember...

...having fun with songs, stories and rhymes in the bath and at bedtime. Putting in sound effects – like splashing in the bath – not only adds to the fun but also links learning to pleasure.

## Did you know?

- Children learn best when activities use several senses at once – like touch, taste and hearing. Talk about what things feel like (soft, hard, slippery), how they taste (bitter, sweet, salty), how they sound (loud, soft, crackly).
- Talking together about everyday actions like getting dressed and cooking – and reading words such as labels and road signs – helps your child improve their language skills as they repeat what you say.
- You can add to their development if you look at maps or books before you go on a trip – or visit a friend or go shopping.
- As children draw, paint and start to write words – and tell you about their day – they're also making sense of their experiences.

## Mathematical development

If you help your child enjoy using numbers and experimenting with them, they'll come on in leaps and bounds. It's about:

- counting
- sorting
- matching
- looking for patterns
- working with numbers, shapes and measures.

There are all kinds of ways to help your child with maths – even if it's not your own strong point. For example:

- use language such as 'greater', 'smaller', 'heavier' or 'lighter' to compare quantities
- talk about, recognise and recreate simple patterns
- use everyday words to describe position
- read or make up stories with numbers in
- sing songs with numbers in – like 'One, two, buckle my shoe. Three, four, knock on the door.' If you don't know the rest, make it up!
- play games using numbers
- count objects into groups
- play with shapes and measures.

## What about ...

... spotting numbers in everyday life and keeping a tally. It's a great numbers game. Talk about why they're there – on houses to help people find them, on buses to tell people their route, on car number plates, on TV channels, the DVD recorder and the microwave. It's a good way to avoid the chorus of 'Are we nearly there?' on a car journey too!

## Did you know?

- Talking about what they're doing when your child fills or empties bags or fits shapes into spaces, helps them understand shapes and sizes – and develops language skills at the same time.
- Noticing shapes of everyday objects such as windows, plates or oranges helps familiarise them with shapes.
- Counting – footsteps, jumps, stairs – is a useful way to reinforce number skills. And helps your child develop their physical skills too!
- Using words like 'more' or 'less', 'heavier' or 'lighter', 'bigger' or 'smaller' helps them learn to compare numbers.

## Knowledge and understanding of the world

In this learning area, children are developing the knowledge, skills and understanding that help them make sense of the world. It forms the foundation for learning science, design and technology, history, geography and computers when they're in full-time school later on.

It's the kind of understanding that children develop through:

- exploring
- watching other people
- working out how to do things
- trying things out for themselves
- communicating with other children and adults.

Being around you and other people, watching what you do and then trying it for themselves, with your support, is a great way for your child to learn. With your encouragement they'll increasingly find that they are capable. And as they gain knowledge and understanding they'll be able to apply what they learn to other areas. For instance, they'll quickly learn how to use a computer and apply some of those skills to working a DVD recorder or microwave.

Children learn effectively by doing things. After all, it's always easier to absorb new techniques if you try them out for yourself. Giving your child plenty of opportunities to try all kinds of experiences will help them build their skills.

## Did you know?

- Investigating living things you come across – like insects and earthworms, trees and leaves – helps them understand the world around them.
- When your child constantly asks 'Why?', they're also gathering useful information and developing their knowledge.
- Encouraging your child to make decisions – like choosing which food to buy or how to make something – is also building their ability to work out what they need and how to achieve it.
- Talking with them about their own and other cultures gives them a sense of belonging and an understanding of differences.

## What about ...

...using an empty box – like a shoe box – to gather a collection of items you find together. Next time you go for a walk, visit a park, or play outside, talk about the things you see and encourage your child to choose something to bring back home. Things like stones, moss, feathers and leaves. Give them a name, talk about their colour and texture. Make a label for each one. They'll be developing skills right across the board.

## Physical development

For young children, physical development is all part of their overall development. They're learning at the same time and using all their senses to make connections between what they're finding out and what they already know.

It's about improving their body's:

- coordination
- control
- manipulation
- movement.



It is also about children developing an understanding of what keeps them healthy and the things that contribute to this such as exercise and eating healthy food.

It has two other very important aspects too – it helps children gain confidence in what they can do and it gives them the chance to feel how great it is to be healthy and active. It's helping them develop a good sense of wellbeing.

## What about ...

... setting up an obstacle course together. It's something you can do inside or out and make it as easy or as difficult as you like. You can use household items like sheets and table cloths (drape over, tunnel under), broom (climb over, prop up), washing up bowl (sit on, in or climb over), empty boxes (sit in or tunnel through), chairs (over armchairs or sofa, under kitchen chairs). Go on, you know you want a go too!

## Did you know?

- Playing games like 'Simon Says', where you give children physical instructions – 'Simon says stand on one leg. Simon says hop' – helps to develop your child's coordination, control and movement.
- Suggesting ways to move freely to music – shuffling, slithering, rolling, crawling, jumping, dancing – develops imagination, vocabulary and language skills as well as physical skills.
- Making a 'den' – outside or in, using chairs, clothes horse, sheets, climbing frame – gives them the chance to balance and climb around, under, over and through. (It's also a great place to tell a story. Take it in turns to say what happens next.)
- Using play dough, making sandcastles, baking cakes and icing them – all develop manipulation skills.

## Creative development

Creativity is an important part of learning. Being creative helps your child extend their understanding. It's not just about art and craft. After all, we can be creative in the language we use, the sounds we make, the clothes we wear, the way we dance.

Being creative helps us adapt and respond to a world that's changing rapidly. We can use creativity to solve problems and think of new ways to deal with challenges. We can use creative role play to widen our horizons – and creative thinking is important in science and maths.

Whatever challenges our children are going to face through life, they'll need to be creative and imaginative. In fact, anyone can be creative, whether or not they can paint, dance or sing. For young children it's about:

- art
- music
- dance
- role play
- imaginative play.

It's something that comes naturally to young children – and grows with encouragement as they gain confidence. They'll do a lot of creative activities in their early years setting – nursery, pre-school, playgroup, childminder or reception class. But you don't have to be an artist yourself to give them opportunities at home.

### What about ...

... putting on your favourite music, pouring some rice or lentils in a screw top jar, adding in a saucepan and a wooden spoon - and you have music, maracas to shake and a drum to bang. Get dancing!

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## Did you know?

- Moving to music gives children a chance to see how we can 'think' with our bodies – expressing emotions like joy or sorrow, or 'being' objects or creatures such as 'a tree', 'a mouse' or 'a monster'.
- Children need to feel safe enough to take risks when they're expressing themselves creatively. So make sure you enter into the spirit of it – if you laugh, make sure you're laughing 'with' them not 'at' them.
- Hang onto a few old clothes, hats, beads, shoes (or visit a jumble or car boot sale). Dressing up and acting out scenes is a great way to develop creativity. They also help children understand people and situations.
- When children direct their own activities, they become more confident in their creative abilities, more skilled with language and better at working things out for themselves.

## What next?

By the time your child comes to the end of the Foundation Stage (normally at the end of reception class), they're ready to move on to Year 1 and Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum in primary school – see the booklet *What your child is learning at school, 5–7*.

In the final term of the Foundation Stage, the reception teacher will draw on the progress record that's been kept throughout the year, and possibly earlier, to complete a **Foundation Stage profile**. The profile, detailing your child's achievements, will help the Year 1 teacher build on your child's progress in relation to each of the learning areas we've covered in this section.

As a parent, you'll be given a written summary of your child's progress in the learning areas – you can also have a copy of the Foundation Stage profile if you'd like one. And of course you'll be able to discuss these with the reception class teacher.

## Want to find out more?

If you'd like to know more about the Birth to Three Matters Framework and the Foundation Stage, you can talk to the staff in the early years setting your child goes to – they'll be happy to tell you more about the learning and development opportunities they offer and share details with you on your child's progress.

**Free part-time early education for all three and four-year-olds.** All three and four-year-olds are guaranteed six terms of high quality, **free part-time early education**. Places are available in schools, nurseries, pre-schools and playgroups and with approved childminder networks.

Your local **Children's Information Service** can tell you how and where you can claim the free part-time early education offer and also has up-to-date lists of registered childcare and early years services.

☎ **ChildcareLink** on **freephone 08000 96 02 96** for the number of your nearest service.

**FREE BOOKS** for children. Sponsored by Sure Start, Bookstart is a scheme that gives books, as a gift, to every baby born in the UK. Parents and carers can contact their health visitor or local library to ask about Bookstart.

### For more information

For Birth to Three Matters, the guidance pack for people looking after babies and young children, visit [www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)

For an online parents' guide to the curriculum, a search of educational resources to help you and your child work together, and detailed info about many other areas of education see [www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk)

### Other useful contact information

**Contact a Family** – supports families with disabled children. ☎ **Helpline: 0808 808 3555** – where you may be able to discuss your needs with other parents in your area. Or visit [www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)

**Early Support Programme** – a Government initiative to improve services for disabled children and their families, especially those under the age of three. For an 'Early Support Family Pack' ☎ **0845 60 222 60** and quote reference ESPP1 [www.espp.org.uk](http://www.espp.org.uk) – for more information about the **Early Support Programme**.

**Early Years Equality** – offers support for ethnic minority parents.

☎ **01244 310569** [www.earlyyearsequality.org](http://www.earlyyearsequality.org)

**Home Start** – offers friendship, support and practical help to parents with young children.

☎ **Free telephone helpline: 08000 68 63 68** or visit [www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk)

**National Family and Parenting Institute** – an independent charity working to support parents in bringing up their children and finding the help and information they need. ☎ **020 7424 3460** or visit [www.e-parents.org](http://www.e-parents.org)

**Parental Involvement** – information on all aspects of parental involvement can be found on this site. [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/)

**Parentline Plus** – 24-hour helpline offering support to anyone caring for a child.

☎ **0808 800 2222** or visit [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

**Parents Online** – learn about your child's early education, interactive links and information about online safety. Go to: [www.parentsonline.gov.uk](http://www.parentsonline.gov.uk)

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