



Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

At this time, information about COVID-19 is rapidly evolving as new details are confirmed and new questions emerge. In the event of an outbreak in your community, as a parent/caregiver, your first concern is about how to protect and take care of your children and family. Knowing important information about the outbreak and learning how to be prepared can reduce your stress and help calm likely anxieties. This resource will help you think about how an infectious disease outbreak might affect your family—both physically and emotionally—and what you can do to help your family cope.

What You Should Know

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. COVID-19 is caused by a novel coronavirus; this means it is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.
- COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that is mainly spread person-to-person. Currently, there is no available vaccine or curative treatment, so the best preventative strategy is to avoid exposure.
- So far, children appear to be much less affected by COVID-19, which was also seen after other coronavirus outbreaks.
- Children with pre-existing illnesses may have different risk, so you should discuss this with your child's medical team.
- To reduce the spread of the virus, a variety of approaches will be used, including keeping those who are sick away from others and promoting healthy hygiene strategies. Additional recommendations for ways to contain the virus's spread could include canceling of events that attract large numbers of people; closing schools, public transit or businesses; and required quarantine, which is the separation and restriction of movement of people who might have been exposed to the virus.

READINESS

Preparing your Family for a Potential Infectious Disease Outbreak

Being prepared is one of the best ways to lessen the impact of an infectious disease outbreak like COVID-19 on your family. Here are some steps that you can take to be better prepared:

Information & Communication

- Identify how you will keep up with the rapidly changing information on COVID-19.
In rapidly changing health events and outbreaks such as COVID-19, there can be large amounts of incorrect or partially correct information that can add to your stress and confusion as a parent/caregiver. Identify a few trusted sources of health information.

The NCTSN relied on the CDC resources to create this document.

Get the most up-to-date and accurate information at:

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

CDC: information on children and COVID 2019:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>

<https://healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>

Plan how you want to discuss COVID-19 with your family. Be sure to include:

What the current disease outbreak is

How it is contracted

What are the possible dangers

Protective steps being taken in the community/nation/global community

Protective steps everyone in the family can take

- Hold your family discussion in a comfortable place and encourage family members to ask questions. Consider having a separate discussion with young children in order to use language they can understand and to address specific fears or misconceptions they may have.
- Create a list of community resources that will be helpful during an outbreak. Make sure you know their emergency telephone numbers, websites, and official social media accounts. These may include: your family's schools, doctors, public health authorities, social services, community mental health center, and crisis hotlines.
- Develop a plan for maintaining contact with friends and family members via telephone and internet in the event that isolation or quarantine is recommended.
- Check in with your children's school about potential homeschool and distance learning opportunities that may be offered during a school closure. Also, if your child receives additional services at school, ask how these will be handled during a closure (e.g., meals, therapeutic services).

Reducing Your Family's Risk: Hygiene, Medical Care & Supplies

Have all family members practice preventive behaviors including:

- Regularly washing hands for 20 seconds with soap and water (length of the A-B-C song) or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Staying home when sick.
- Covering the mouth and nose with a tissue or with the bend/crook of the arm when coughing or sneezing.

Keep basic health supplies on hand (e.g., soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, and a thermometer).

Make sure you have a supply of medications taken regularly.

If your child takes medication for a chronic condition, talk with your child's medical provider about plans to get a supply at home that will last through any period of home isolation for your family.

Have your family work together to gather items that might be needed during an outbreak. These include drinking water, nonperishable food, and cash. Be sure to include activities, books, and games for children in case a lengthy time at home is recommended. Remember to include batteries in your item list if those are needed for certain activities and games.

**HAVE ALL YOUR
FAMILY MEMBERS
PRACTICE GOOD
HYGIENE AND
PREVENTIVE
BEHAVIORS.**

Coping with the Stress of an Infectious Disease Outbreak like COVID-19

Even if your family is prepared, an outbreak can be very stressful. To help your family cope with this stress, following these recommendations can help:

Information & Communication

- Keep updated about what is happening with the outbreak and additional recommendations by getting information from credible media outlets, local public health authorities, and updates from public health websites (e.g., CDC).
- Seek support and continued connections from friends and family by talking to them on the telephone, texting, or communicating through email or social media. Schools may have additional ways to stay in contact with educators and classmates.
- Although you need to stay informed, minimize exposure to media outlets or social media that might promote fear or panic. Be particularly aware of (and limit) how much media coverage or social media time your children are exposed to about the outbreak.
- E-mail and texting may be the best ways to stay in contact with others during an outbreak, as the Internet may have the most sensational media coverage and may be spreading rumors. Check in regularly with your children about what they have viewed on the Internet and clarify any misinformation.
- Focus on supporting children by encouraging questions and helping them understand the current situation.
 - Talk about their feelings and validate these
 - Help them express their feelings through drawing or other activities
 - Clarify misinformation or misunderstandings about how the virus is spread and that not every respiratory disease is COVID-19
 - Provide comfort and a bit of extra patience
 - Check back in with your children on a regular basis or when the situation changes

NOTE: During an outbreak, stigma and rejection can occur against individuals who live in affected communities, against health-care workers, and individuals with other illnesses.

Scheduling & Activities

- Even if your family is isolated or quarantined, realize this will be temporary.
- Keep your family's schedule consistent when it comes to bedtimes, meals, and exercise.
- Make time to do things at home that have made you and your family feel better in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising, or engaging in religious activities (prayer, participating in services on the Internet).
- Have children participate in distance learning opportunities that may be offered by their schools or other institutions/organizations.
- Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting disease, anxiety, stress, and panic are normal reactions to a stressful situation such as a disease outbreak.
- Help your family engage in fun and meaningful activities consistent with your family and cultural values.

Hygiene & Medical Care

- Find ways to encourage proper hygiene and health promoting behavior with your children (create drawings to remember family routines; sing a song for length needed to wash hands like the A-B-C or Happy Birthday song, twice). Include them in household jobs or activities so they feel a sense of accomplishment. Provide praise and encouragement for engaging in household jobs and good hygiene.
- Reassure your children that you will take them to the pediatrician and get medical care if needed. Explain, however, that not every cough or sneeze means that they or others have COVID-19.

Self Care & Coping

- Modify your daily activities to meet the current reality of the situation and focus on what you can accomplish.
- Shift expectations and priorities to focus more on what gives you meaning, purpose, or fulfillment.

Give yourself small breaks from the stress of the situation.
- Attempt to control self-defeating statements and replace them with more helpful thoughts. Here's a helpful checklist for identifying unhealthy thoughts and coping with them:
<https://aramiliesfirst.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Cognitive-Distortions.pdf>.
- Remember, you are a role model for your children. How you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their worries.
- If your family has experienced a serious illness or the death of a loved one, find ways to support each other, including:

Reach out to your friends and family, talking to them about the death of your loved one. Use telephone, email, or social media to communicate if necessary.

Find ways to honor the death of your loved one. Some activities may be done as a family, while additional activities may be done individually.

Seek religious/spiritual help or professional counseling for support. This may be available online or by telephone during an outbreak.

HELPING CHILDREN COPE

Your children may respond differently to an outbreak depending on their age. Below are some reactions according to age group and the best ways you can respond:

AGE GROUP	REACTIONS	HOW TO HELP
PRESCHOOL	Fear of being alone, bad dreams Speech difficulties Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting Change in appetite Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors	Patience and tolerance Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime Maintain regular family routines Avoid media exposure

<p>SCHOOL-AGE (ages 6-12)</p>	<p>Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior</p> <p>Clinging, nightmares</p> <p>Sleep/appetite disturbance</p> <p>Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)</p> <p>Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest</p> <p>Competition for parents' attention</p> <p>Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school</p>	<p>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</p> <p>Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet</p> <p>Regular exercise and stretching</p> <p>Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)</p> <p>Participate in structured household chores</p> <p>Set gentle but firm limits</p> <p>Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community</p> <p>Encourage expression through play and conversation</p> <p>Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines</p> <p>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</p> <p>Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation</p>
<p>ADOLESCENT (ages 13-18)</p>	<p>Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)</p> <p>Sleep/appetite disturbance</p> <p>Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy</p> <p>Ignoring health promotion behaviors</p> <p>Isolating from peers and loved ones</p> <p>Concerns about stigma and injustices</p> <p>Avoiding/cutting school</p>	<p>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</p> <p>Encourage continuation of routines</p> <p>Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)</p> <p>Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games</p> <p>Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors</p> <p>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</p> <p>Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak</p>

SEEKING ADDITIONAL HELP

If you or a loved one is having a difficult time coping with the outbreak and want to seek outside help, there are ways to get that help. For example:

- Get support regarding your anxiety or stress by speaking to a trained counselor at SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or by texting TalkWithUS 66746.
- Contact your physician or your insurance company (if they have a consultation line) to ask health-related questions or to seek mental health support.
- Learn more ways to help your family. Additional resources can be accessed at:
 - www.NCTSN.org
 - www.healthychildren.org
 - www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html

Last updated: March 1, 2020

Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak



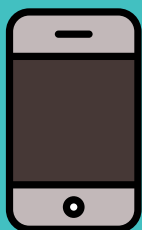
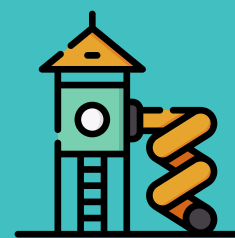
Children may respond to stress in different ways such as being more clingy, anxious, withdrawing, angry or agitated, bedwetting etc.

Respond to your child's reactions in a supportive way, listen to their concerns and give them extra love and attention.

Children need adults' love and attention during difficult times. Give them extra time and attention.

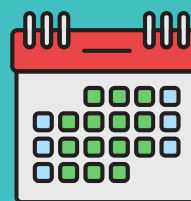
Remember to listen to your children, speak kindly and reassure them.

If possible, make opportunities for the child to play and relax.



Try and keep children close to their parents and family and avoid separating children and their caregivers to the extent possible. If separation occurs (e.g. hospitalization) ensure regular contact (e.g. via phone) and re-assurance.

Keep to regular routines and schedules as much as possible, or help create new ones in a new environment, including school/learning as well as time for safely playing and relaxing.



Provide facts about what has happened, explain what is going on now and give them clear information about how to reduce their risk of being infected by the disease in words that they can understand depending on their age.

This also includes providing information about what could happen in a re-assuring way (e.g. a family member and/or the child may start not feeling well and may have to go to the hospital for some time so doctors can help them feel better).

WHAT IS A FAMILY MEDIA USE PLAN?

A Family Media Use Plan helps parents balance their children's online and off-line lives. Because every family is different, the American Academy of Pediatrics has a new tool to help you create a personalized plan that works within your family's values and busy lifestyles.



Younger Than 1½ to 2 Years

Avoid media use (except video chatting).

Preschoolers

No more than 1 hour per day of high-quality programming

Grade-schoolers & Teens

Don't let media displace other important activities.

- 1 hour of exercise daily
- Family meals
- A full night's sleep
- "Unplugged" downtime

All Ages

Co-view media with your kids (enjoy it with them) to help them learn from what they are doing, seeing, and saying online.

Be their media mentor!

Create your family's plan at HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan.

By creating a Family Media Use Plan, parents can help children and teens balance their media use with other healthy activities.



Learn more and create a personalized Family Media Use Plan at HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan.

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DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

Laughter in the Family

Children laugh easily and often, some say more than ten times as often as adults do. Children's laughter is a precious gift that can lighten our hearts and, studies show, even improve our health when we laugh with them. At the same time, our laughter tells them what is funny and helps develop their sense of humour, for their benefit and our own.

Benefits of laughter

It's fun to laugh, which is reason enough to make space for humour in our lives, but if you need convincing, here are some of the benefits.

For **children**, a good sense of humour supports healthy development in several ways.

- **Cognitively**, humour develops the ability to see two sides of the same picture and think creatively.
- Exploring and playing with words improves **language skills**.
- Humour is also a **social skill** that helps children make friends and feel part of a group.
- **Self-esteem** and confidence grow when children see they can make others laugh and feel good.
- A sense of humour helps children take a step back from fears and disappointments to see the funny side. This builds the capacity for **resilience** in the face of difficult emotions.

It doesn't hurt **adults** to laugh either.

- Many health benefits are claimed for daily laughter: lower blood pressure, better digestion, greater resistance to illness.
- At the end of a hard day at work, laughing with your children can be the best stress reduction program around.

Finally, shared humour strengthens the **family**.

- Laughing together builds **family bonds** that will help carry you through other, more difficult times.
- Sharing jokes can take the edge off some of the normal tensions **between siblings**.
- Made-up jokes that come out of shared family experiences build **feelings of belonging**.
- Humour is a gentle way to **guide children's behaviour** and have fun while you're doing it.

Instead of getting angry, try getting funny. Make a joke about where a sock goes. (On your nose? On your ear?) Your antics could turn an uncooperative toddler into one who's giggling and eager to correct your mistake... and get dressed in the process!

Developing a sense of humour

Like every other aspect of development, a child's sense of humour goes through a number of stages. In the beginning, babies laugh in imitation of our laughter. They also respond spontaneously to **tickle games and bouncing rhymes**. (But be careful to watch their expression and stop at the first sign they've had enough.) Later, once children have learned a bit about how the world *normally* works, they laugh at the **unexpected** (like the sock on the nose). They also enjoy games that play on the **edge of anxieties**. Peek-a-boo and hide-and-go-seek awaken the fear of losing the parent... and then everyone laughs when the parent is found again.

Later still, children like to **play with words**. They enjoy silly songs, with lots of repetition. They like the surprise of substituting nonsense words in familiar rhymes. **Visual surprises** in picture books make them laugh too: a horse up in a tree, a duck on someone's head. **Slapstick** humour appeals to them as well.

Around age six, children start to turn their word play into **jokes and riddles**. At first, their delivery may fall a bit flat, but they'll be pleased if you laugh at their efforts. They discover that words that have two meanings can be a source of fun. (What's the best month for a parade? – March, of course!) Let them give you the punch line, even if you know it. This is a time when it's easy to allow them to feel they're in control of the situation.

Setting limits

Occasionally, you will need to set limits on children's sense of humour. Four year olds often like to play with **bathroom words**. You probably want them to know that these jokes are inappropriate in polite company. Also, fun is **only fun if everyone's laughing**. Tickling your brother isn't funny when it starts to hurt. Saying mean things about someone else is *never* funny. Help children make the difference between laughing *with* someone else and laughing *at* them. Preteens in particular are often so self-conscious that they easily think they're the target of other people's attempts at humour. They'll be able to get some distance on their experience when they're older, but during this phase, it's better to let them do the joking.

A gift for life

Family life can be rushed and stressful, but it can also be full of moments for fun and laughter if you can step back and open yourself up to the funny side. These will be treasured memories for you and your children.

by Betsy Mann

Family Routines

Life with children can seem chaotic, at times even out of control. Establishing some basic routines can restore a sense of order that will make life easier for both parents and children. A routine doesn't mean a rigid schedule; young children need structure with flexibility (especially on weekends). For most families, things work better when everyday activities follow a predictable pattern.

Benefits for children

- **Sense of security** - When things happen in the same order every day, children learn to predict what comes next. They feel safe and secure because someone else is taking care of things for them; they don't have to worry.
- **Trust** - Children learn to trust when the people who care for them follow a dependable routine. This is the foundation on which they build their trust in the larger world.
- **Self-confidence** - Children's confidence in themselves also increases when they are able to predict what will come next.
- **Good habits** - Routines, such as regular exercise, build good health habits that teach children to look after themselves.

Benefits for parents

- **Planning** - Having a routine helps parents plan to accomplish necessary chores. Especially with a small baby, finding time to take a shower and buy groceries can be a challenge!
- **Discipline** - Children are less likely to test the rules by misbehaving when regular tasks become part of an established routine. If tidying up toys always comes before washing hands and sitting down to eat, most children will stop protesting and get to work fairly quickly. If bath is always followed by bed, a story, a song, a goodnight kiss and a wave from the bedroom door, sleep will come more easily.

What makes a good routine?

We are all individuals; there is no recipe for a routine that works for every family. Here are some factors to consider, along with examples of questions to ask yourself when planning a routine. Remember to take into account the needs and preferences of both parents and children.

- **Physical needs** - Is everyone fed and well rested before taking part in other activities? Is there time for physical activity (a walk to the park, energetic dancing in the living room) every day? Does the routine let everyone get enough sleep?
- **Social needs** - Are toddlers getting together with

other children their age? Are parents seeing friends? (Playgroups can answer both these needs.)

- **Intellectual needs** - Do children get time to play in ways that stimulate their understanding of their surroundings? Are parents getting enough adult conversation?
- **Emotional needs** - Are babies getting the comforting they need? Do children feel secure in their parents' attention? Are parents getting support?
- **Stage of development** - Does the routine take into account how needs change as children grow? More snacks during a growth spurt? More choices offered to toddlers? (For instance, "Will you brush your teeth before the bath or after?") More responsibilities transferred to older children. (For instance, helping to prepare snack or making a school lunch.)
- **Individual differences** - Does the routine allow for a child's particular temperament? For instance, limiting the number of errands because this child has trouble making transitions from store to car to store to car... Or lots of flexibility because this child has irregular body rhythms and isn't hungry at the same time every day. Or always the same routine because this child doesn't like surprises.

Changing the routine

Sometimes, changing the routine can solve behaviour problems.

- **Change the sequence** - Even if people tell you a bath before bed calms children, your child may get excited and have trouble going to sleep. The problem might disappear if you move bath time before supper.
- **Recognize a need** - If your child always has a tantrum before supper, maybe she's hungry. Try adding an afternoon snack to the routine. Or maybe she needs to be sure of your attention. Try a short playtime with you before you start cooking or let her shred the lettuce beside you.
- **Smooth transitions** - Children often misbehave when it is time to change activities. To avoid trouble, try adding a song to the routine to signal upcoming changes. For example, if a toddler has to stop playing to go meet an older brother's school bus, sing "Johnny's bus is coming soon, we will go to meet him," sung to the tune of "Frère Jacques." The song gives children time to adjust and make the transition.

Routines are never set in stone; they will always need to be adapted as conditions change. By observing your children, by knowing your own needs, you will be able to make a predictable routine that suits your family.

by Betsy Mann, with help from Linda Martin, Family Visitor Program Coordinator, Better Beginnings, Better Futures, Ottawa.

MY DAILY SCHEDULE

ACTIVITY

CHECK WHEN COMPLETE



WAKE UP



EAT BREAKFAST



GET DRESSED AND BRUSH TEETH



PLAYTIME OR ERRANDS



EAT LUNCH



STORY TIME AND NAP



PLAYTIME



EAT DINNER



TAKE A BATH AND BRUSH TEETH



STORY TIME AND IN BED

MY DAILY SCHEDULE

ACTIVITY

CHECK WHEN COMPLETE

Routines for Morning and Night

Reliable schedules make a world of difference. Here are guidelines and suggested examples for your family.



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Routines for Morning and Night

Reliable schedules make a world of difference. Here are guidelines and suggested examples for your family.

Though they may insist otherwise, children with ADHD desperately need and often thrive with reliable daily routines—particularly in the morning and at bedtime. Why? Many children with ADHD exhibit executive function deficits, which means they have a hard time organizing tasks in their minds—making it difficult to figure out how much time it will take to brush their teeth, take a bath, or choose an outfit. Creating a daily routine to guide them through these trouble spots provides external organization, giving your children the chance to prepare for school or wind down once the day is over without anxiety or stress.

MORNING

Perhaps your morning begins with flickering lights, music, and kisses as you try to rouse your child, who wants nothing more than five more minutes of peace. Fifteen minutes later, when you stop by her room to call her to breakfast, you find her absorbed in a game, half-dressed. And once she's seated at the table, she balks at what you're offering for breakfast.

Launching the day can be stressful for any parent; it's particularly so for those of us whose children need extra time to get going or who are easily sidetracked. Try these strategies and this sample routine to start the day on a better note.

Waking Up:

- **Invest in a good alarm clock**—preferably one that will wake the dead. Try one of our ADHD-tested alarm clocks like [Clocky](#) or the [Sonic Bomb](#), or make the most of the alarm you've got by setting it on a metal pie pan with dimes in it and placing it just out of arm's reach.
- **Gently awaken with a touch.** Many kids with ADHD are extremely sensitive to touch. Try gently wiping a cool, damp washcloth over your sleepy kid's brow and cheeks while whispering a morning greeting. This routine should be agreed to ahead of time to avoid overstimulation.
- **Let light into the room.** If it's naturally dark outside at night, leave the bedroom curtains parted to allow natural light to prod your child into wakefulness in the morning. Or install a dimmer switch and turn up the light gradually on dark mornings.
- **Consider pre-wakeup meds.** If your child takes ADHD medication, ask his doctor about giving him a minimal dose of short-acting (not timed-release) meds 30 minutes before the alarm is set to ring and then letting him rest until wake-up time. This small amount of medication should supplement, not replace, the prescribed morning dosage.

Getting Ready:

- **Pace your children's routines.** If you have more than one child, chances are you are spending time keeping them from fighting with each other. Stagger their routines, so that one child is up earlier and out of the way of the other. Their paths needn't cross in the bathroom or at the breakfast table.
- **Enjoy breakfast.** Eating breakfast together is great, except when it isn't. If your child makes war at the table, or just has trouble sitting down and eating, let him enjoy his meal in his room as he

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from the editors of

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Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

dresses. Or give him breakfast to-go in the form of a piece of fruit, a chunk of cheese, and a Lara Bar. Do what works for your family—and forget the “shoulds.”

- **Turn on the TV!?** Consider allowing hyperactive children to watch the tube while eating. This works wonders for certain kids who cannot sit still long enough to get breakfast eaten.
- **Dodge common morning clashes.** If you're fighting with your daughter over her choice of clothes, ask yourself whether it's worth battling over socks that don't match.
- **Lay on the praise.** Compliment him for every step forward. If necessary, reward your child for each stress-free morning.
- **Keep your weekend and vacation routines the same.** Letting kids sleep in too long makes it harder for them to get back on track on Monday morning.
- **Reward your child for every good morning.** Set up a reward system, and let your child add a sticker to his chart or a token to his jar for getting out the door with a minimum of fuss. Exchange a set number of tokens for a small reward, like a new toy or a mini-golf outing.

Sample Morning Routine:

7:00 A.M. —Wake up your child.

7:05 A.M. — Get ready:

—Wash face

—Comb hair

—Get dressed

7:20 A.M. —Breakfast time.

7:45 A.M. —Brush your teeth—
together.

7:55 A.M. —Zip, tie, and layer up

8:00 A.M. —Out the door!

Routines for Morning and Night

from the editors of

ADDITUDE
Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

Advice from Other Parents:

“We have a morning checklist that the boys (both ADHD) complete. We use a poker chip point system for rewards.” —*Brenna*

“We use a custom-made ‘Morning Routine’ checklist to stay on track getting up in the morning.” —*Sheryl*

“One thing I’ve learned: Always add an extra five or ten minutes to your morning routine to allot for the unexpected!” —*Valeria*

“To get out the door in the mornings, the kids use a checklist on a magnet board that has bright pictures and is hung on the kitchen door.” —*Paige*

“We have a morning routine and evening routine and our son’s daily timetable on his bedroom wall.” —*Amber*

“I find the only way for mornings to run smoother is TIME. Giving us time to do everything in the morning has proven more important than my son getting that extra 15 minutes of sleep.” —*Amber*

“My daughter has an app on her iPad for her morning schedule so she knows what she needs to do next.” —*Melissa*

“There are mini dry erase boards in the bathroom to keep kids focused on the morning routine.” —*Melanie*

“We found that our home runs best in the morning with music as opposed to TV. CDs are turned on in the bedroom 10 minutes before it’s time to wake up. Something lively, yet gentle.” —*BGM*

“We try to get routines set in place in the first few weeks of school, so that our mornings are streamlined by the time things get hectic.” —*Heather*

“Since transitions of any kind are hard for my 12 year old, I give him time to get up. I’ll wake him up 15 minutes before he has to get up and then we begin ‘5 more minutes’ until he’s up.” —*Debbie*

Routines for Morning and Night

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NIGHT

After a long day of school, homework, and sports, many children with ADHD are so wound-up they can't turn off their motor by the time bedtime rolls around. For parents who are at their wit's end, the key is to start planning for bedtime long before 9 P.M. A reliable and consistent bedtime routine will help your child get in the right mindset for sleep each and every night. Follow these tips to help your child get the sleep he needs to wake up physically and mentally refreshed.

Preparing for the Next Day:

- **Plan for an early bedtime.** Catching enough Zzzs is essential for anyone with ADHD. Start your evening routine early enough for your child to get about 10 hours of sleep every night.
- **Make decisions at night.** Choose clothes for school the night before. Also set breakfast and lunch menus to avoid discussions about them in the morning.
- **Pack the sack.** Place your child's papers and books inside his backpack—and leave it near, or even blocking, the front door, where it can't be left behind.
- **Have your child take his bath or shower before bedtime,** when time isn't so precious and it's less likely that someone else will need the bathroom. He'll sleep better and there will be one less rushed item—and less conflict—in the morning.

If your child is particularly restless at night, opt for a bath instead of a shower. The warm water and pleasantly scented bubble bath can be a great relaxing agent, especially for young children. Try soap with a light sleep-friendly scent—like lavender or chamomile—to avoid overwhelming a hypersensitive child.

- **Provide a protein-rich bedtime snack.** Tryptophan, the protein that occurs in milk, turkey, and chicken, is a natural sleep inducer. But just about any protein-rich snack about 30 minutes before bedtime is an efficient get-to-sleep aid. Try oatmeal, whole-wheat cereal, an egg, some meat or fish, cheese, or pumpkin or sunflower seeds.
- **Play a quiet, low-stakes game, or read a book.** The light from electronic devices can throw off your child's circadian rhythm,

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making it more difficult for her to fall asleep naturally. Playing an old-fashioned game—or reading a book if your child is highly competitive—can help her let off any excess energy leftover from the day, as well as providing some quality bonding time for the whole family.

- **Steer clear of sleeping pills.** Most sleep medications that work well for adults haven't been adequately tested for their safety and effectiveness in children. A supplement like melatonin or valerian is a safer bet. Ask your doctor about the appropriate dosage for your child.
- **Look into relaxation techniques.** Deep breathing or listening to soothing music can make it easier to fall asleep. Try teaching your child a few simple deep breathing exercises, like this one: Take five slow, deep breaths through the nostrils, rest for five regular breaths, then take five more deep breaths. Repeat as necessary.
- **Have a sweet and personal nightly lights-out ritual.** Not only does this help your child feel secure about his place in your family, it also helps signal to his brain that it's time for sleep. For example, try giving your child a hug and saying, "I love you to the moon and back. Sleep tight!"

When a Child Refuses To Go To Bed

Some children with ADHD—especially those who also suffer from oppositional defiant disorder or an anxiety disorder—will do anything to avoid going to bed. If you do manage to get them to go to bed, odds are, they'll be up and about a short time later.

If this describes your child, your best bet may be a behavioral approach: Give strict orders for your child to stay in bed between certain hours, and sit outside her bedroom door to make sure she stays in bed.

If your child gets up, calmly tuck her back into bed. Then, in a soft but firm voice, remind her that it's time to go to sleep. Reassure her that you will be nearby in case she needs you. After a few nights of this routine, she will come to understand that resisting is futile—and you'll no longer have to sit vigilantly outside her door.

Use caution with this approach; it can be stressful for parents, as well as children. Don't attempt it unless you and your partner both feel confident that you have the resolve and the stamina to follow through. If you allow your

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child to break the rules, even once, you're sunk. Deviating from the rules is permissible only in the case of illness or some other special situation.

Sample Bedtime Routine:

- 8:00 P.M.** — Have your child shower or take a relaxing bath.
- 8:20 P.M.** — Get into PJs, have a light snack, and clean up any toys left out from the evening.
- 8:30 P.M.** — Brush teeth and go to the bathroom.
- 8:45 P.M.** — Your child gets into bed. Read with your child briefly, or talk about your days together. Before turning off the lights, say your ritual goodnight
- 9:00 P.M.** — Turn off the lights and exit quietly.

Advice from Other Parents:

“We have a white board in my bedroom for the kids to write down the ‘Oh yeah, I forgot’ things before bed.” —*Cristin*

“Before bed, the backpack is packed with homework, permission slips, house key, and cellphone (turned off!).” —*Machelle*

“We take our showers at night and I iron my clothes at night. This way I can function normally in the morning—even when my daughter is having an off-day.” —*PurpleDiva*

“We utilize a large dry erase board calendar that we put everyone’s schedule on with a different colored marker. We review it each night so everyone has a ‘preview’ of what the next day looks like.” —*Patty*

“Keeping our family on schedule begins the night before. All electronic devices are turned off 10 minutes before showers.” —*BGM*

“To keep the kids’ heads as clear and focused as possible, I do a reminder each night before bed for what’s coming up the next day.” —*Kim*

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“We try to keep to the same schedule each day, during the summer, holiday and weekends... especially bedtimes. Everyone is more well-rested and less cranky to handle the tasks for the day.” —*Stephanie*

“For my high school student, I message him each night with the next day’s schedule (mine and his separately) so that he knows what to expect and can refer back to it throughout his day if needed. This includes reminders for his school projects (‘read two chapters for your book report,’ etc.) to help him stay on track.” —*Carla*

“We have a family meeting every Sunday night where we discuss all of the scheduled events of the week.” —*Lauren*

“A printed copy of our weekly schedule is always attached to the freezer door—because a scoop of ice cream is a favorite nightly treat in our home!” —*BGM*

“I’ve found it works best to knock homework out of the way ASAP so that we can have less stress by the time we’re heading to bed.” —*Rebecca*

GENERAL ROUTINE TIPS

Adapt Routines to Your Child

Your routine should reflect your child’s personality, your family values, and your child’s needs. If your child needs extra down time between waking up and eating breakfast, work this into your schedule. If your child enjoys long baths or reading in bed before falling asleep, put this into your routine. Take your child’s needs and personality into account when creating the routine.

Make it Public

Once you create a routine for your child, type it out and keep a copy of it in a central location—like the kitchen or living room. You, your spouse, caregivers, and your child can reference it to make sure every day is consistent and everyone is following the schedule. If you laminate the routine, your child can use a dry-erase marker to cross out tasks he completed.

Use Pictures for Younger Children

Illustrations or photos should spell out each step—dressing, washing up, brushing hair, and so on. Post them in the bedroom or the bathroom—or both.

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Making Structure Routine

A visual schedule is great, but don't stop there. Use other tools to make sure your family follows the routine every day.

- A kitchen timer helps your child stay on schedule
- Calendars on smartphones allow you to set reminders
- Behavior charts can be used to reward your child for following the schedule

Build in Flexibility

Life doesn't always follow the schedule you set. If bedtime usually begins at 8:30 and you're stuck in traffic—20 minutes away from your house—your routine is going to be off. Be prepared to make adjustments when needed and use this as an opportunity to teach your child that everyone needs to be flexible from time to time.

Narrate the Routine

Make an audiotape that guides your young child. Enliven your words with soothing music, or by singing parts of the tasks and including humor.

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ADDitude Special Reports Available Now

www.adhdreports.com

Your ADHD Homework Survival Guide

Use this ADHD-friendly guide to help you (and your child) survive nightly homework without tears, tantrums, or fights.

After working hard to focus and remember all day long, your child fights his nightly homework with a vengeance. And who can blame him? Children with ADHD struggle with executive functions, working memory, and restlessness — skills that are taxed all day. Parents who are tired of daily battles over vocab lists and multiplication tables agree: There has to be a better way. In this 50-page special report, you'll learn how to break the bad homework cycle and keep your child learning.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/hw-guide>

A Parent's Guide to ADHD, Diet, and Nutrition

The foods, vitamins, minerals, supplements, and herbs that can help your child manage symptoms.

What is a good ADHD diet? Is sugar the enemy? What about gluten? Dairy? In this comprehensive special report, we detail the connection between the food your child eats and the severity of his hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity, covering topics from artificial dyes and flavors to the right amount of protein.

>> Learn More About This Special Report: <http://additu.de/nutrition>

Video Games and the ADHD Brain

Setting limits on screen time, easing transitions, choosing smart games, and keeping your child safe online.

For children with ADHD, the instant gratification of video games can easily become addictive, leaving parents struggling to balance their child's passion for gaming with safety and normal development outside of the virtual world. In this expert guide, we outline how parents can pick brain-boosting video games, how to enforce reasonable limits, and what steps to take if your child takes his Minecraft obsession a little too far.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/minecraft>

FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets

Great Sports and Activities for Kids with ADHD

The most beneficial after-school sports for the ADHD brain.

10 Toughest Discipline Dilemmas — Solved!

Expert solutions for meltdowns, defiance, or disrespectful behavior in children of all ages.

Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?

Use this self-test to find out if your child's problems at school may be due to LD.

Sleep Solutions for Kids with ADHD

Help your child fall asleep and stay asleep, every single night.

18 Writing Tricks for ADHD Students

Use these strategies to help your child put her ideas on paper.

10 Solutions for Disorganization at School

Use these tips to get lockers, backpacks, and desks under control.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

[http://additu.de/
freedownloads](http://additu.de/freedownloads)

FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

Why Don't I Have a Best Friend?

>> <http://additu.de/best-friend>

Nothing is as heartbreaking for a parent as seeing your child repeatedly strike out in the social arena. Just because he *wants* to make friends doesn't mean he can turn into a social butterfly overnight—but fortunately, there are things parents can do to help. Fred Frankel, Ph.D., shares strategies for helping your child foster true friendships.

Screen-Smart Parenting

>> <http://additu.de/screen-smart>

Do your kids always have a controller or tablet glued to their hands? Instead of fighting it, why not learn how to make technology work for your child with ADHD? Jodi Gold, M.D., a nationally recognized expert in adolescent and child psychiatry, shares helpful tips to understand the risks of technology, as well as strategies to teach your child the rules of being a citizen of the digital world.

ADHD and Gifted? Helping Twice-Exceptional Kids Succeed

>> <http://additu.de/ze-kids>

When special needs children are also gifted, it takes the help of a strong advocate to put them on the path to success. In this presentation, hosted by Diane M. Kennedy and Rebecca Banks-Cull, you'll learn how to navigate the complicated 2E maze of ADHD, learning disabilities, and giftedness to pave the way for your child's bright future.

How Stress Impacts Learning and Behavior

>> <http://additu.de/stress>

In today's high-pressure school environment, kids with ADHD or LD can become overwhelmed by stress. In this audio and slide presentation, hosted by Jerome J. Schultz, Ph.D., find out how school stress impacts your child's brain—and what you can do about it. Get the tools you need to help your child manage academic stress so their brain has room to grow and learn!

Emotions in ADHD Teens

>> <http://additu.de/teens>

Dealing with an emotionally volatile teen? It could be her ADHD. Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D., offers strategies for maintaining emotional control, as well as advice for teaching teens to find emotional balance.

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Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, plus strategies for school, parenting, and living better with ADHD: <http://additu.de/email>

Adult ADHD and LD (weekly)

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

Parenting ADHD and LD Children (weekly)

Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

ADHD and LD at School (bimonthly; weekly from August through October)

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more.

Treating ADHD (weekly)

Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.

The power of Play

Learning
through play
from birth to three



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Play

From day one, children are eager and determined to understand how the world works. They do this through play, using all the “tools” they have at their disposal.

Watch your child at play, and you will see the kind of concentration, passion, and creative excitement that artists and scientists bring to their projects.

An 8-week-old learns about communication and the joy of close relationships as he smiles, coos, and gurgles when his dad talks with him. A 15-month-old uses her body and mind to learn about up and down, high and low, and how strong and competent she is on a trip with grandma to the playground. A 3-year-old playing pretend develops her own ideas, uses her imagination, and builds friendships.

Playing with your child is not only fun, it's one of the most important ways you can nurture her development. There are no rules when it comes to play. And you don't need fancy toys. In fact, you are your child's favorite toy.

Every child is unique. Your child may have special skills or special needs. Follow your child's lead. She'll let you know what interests her. When she sees the pleasure and delight you take in her discoveries, she'll want to play more and more. Play will benefit you, too. Being spontaneous and having fun can relieve stress and create positive memories for both you and your child. And when your child is engaged and having fun, she is learning. Play is truly the work of childhood.



You are your child's favorite toy.

What You Can Do:

Safety First

Remember, your little explorer will need you to keep his play areas safe. Make sure toys don't have parts that fit all the way in his mouth. Get down on his level to see what he can reach. This is especially important as he learns to move. It will mean far fewer "no's," which makes everyone happier.

Watch and Wait

See what your child is trying to do. Provide just enough support for him to achieve his goal or take the next step towards a new goal. You might bring an object your newborn is staring at closer so he can explore it with his hands. Or, you may encourage your toddler to try a different space where the puzzle piece might fit when he is getting frustrated.

Follow the Leader

Some children love lots of bells and whistles; others find a lot of noise overwhelming and prefer to explore with their eyes. Some crave lots of movement, rolling, crawling, or jumping. Others are most interested in using their hands to figure out how a toy or object works. Follow her lead, and you'll discover what kinds of activities are right for her.

Young Explorers

Birth to 12 months

Playing with your baby begins by engaging all of his senses. His eyes, ears, nose, hands, and mouth are his tools. As he grows, he learns to use his body to make discoveries. He begins to reach and grasp (watch out for long hair and dangling earrings!), which allows him to explore toys in new ways. By the time he's 9 months, he will understand cause and effect: "I push the button to make the music play." He will also understand that things he can't see still exist. This means he'll be looking for the ball that rolled behind the couch and calling for you when you leave the room. As he approaches his first birthday, he will be a great communicator, using his gestures, facial expressions, sounds, and maybe even some "words" (such as "duh" for "dog"). Before you know it, you'll have a hard time remembering when he couldn't talk.

Close-up: **Using All My Senses**

Marsha's four-month-old son, Jared, loves his rattle. "Let's watch it fly," Marsha suggests. She moves the rattle through the air so Jared can see it. Jared's little arms and legs go like egg-beaters! When Marsha hands the toy to Jared, he grabs it and begins to chew. Jared then shakes the rattle and delights in the soft, tinkling noise. Soon, Jared gets tired and turns his head away. Marsha takes the rattle and continues to shake it in front of Jared's face. Jared closes his eyes and begins to wail. "Okay, I get it. Time for a break," says Marsha. She picks up Jared and cuddles him.

During this playtime with mom, Jared learns about:

- **sounds of words** and the **rhythm of language** as his mom talks with him.
- **communication** as he and his mom engage in a back-and-forth "conversation" and as his mom reads and responds to his cues.
- **his own self-worth** as he sees how much pleasure his mom gets from playing with him.
- **imitation** and **cause and effect** when he shakes the rattle like mom and hears the noise.
- **hand-eye coordination** as he reaches and grasps the rattle.
- **objects** when he hears the rattle's sounds, sees its colors, feels its texture, and even smells and tastes it.

Playtime for Babies

Back and Forth

Coo and talk to your baby. You can imitate her sounds and wait for her to respond. Encourage her to copy you, too. Show her that pushing the button makes the toy dog bark or how she can turn the pages of a book.

Peek-a-Boo

Try hiding behind your hands, a diaper, or a onesie as you dress your baby. Early on, he may show his pleasure simply by paying close attention. Then he may smile, kick his legs, and make sounds. By 9 months, he may pull your hands away from your face to “find” you.

Sing and Dance

Listen to different kinds of music and dance in different ways to see what your baby likes best. Sing a favorite song that has been passed down through your family. Don't worry about the sound of your voice — he loves to hear you.

Play Ball

Offer a ball with different colors and textures. Let your baby explore it with all her senses. Encourage her to see what else she can do with it. This will eventually help her learn to roll it, drop it in a box, and take it out again.

Q My neighbor's baby loves his mobile. He kicks his arms and legs and squeals with delight. I got the same mobile for my baby, and he hates it. He turns his head away and cries every time I turn it on. What does this mean?

A Children have different levels of tolerance. While some can handle lots of sound and movement all at once, others find that overwhelming. It sounds like your baby is telling you that this mobile is more than he can handle. Try just letting him look at it without turning on the music. When he seems to be calm and enjoying that, try gently moving it so he can see it turn. If he likes it, you can try adding the music. Slowly and sensitively introducing him to more stimulation can help him build greater tolerance over time.



Movers & Shakers

12 to 24 months

Possibilities for play grow by leaps and bounds for your young toddler. She learns to communicate better with gestures, sounds, and words. She also learns to stand on two feet and walk forwards and backwards — even run, jump, and climb. And she's using her fingers and hands to play with and explore objects in more complex ways. Children also have preferences for how they like to explore. Some like lots of action. Others prefer more calm, quiet play. Watch and you will see the activities your child enjoys.

Toddlers are also entering the world of make-believe. They go from imitating what they see in “real life” to using their imagination. Whether in the sand-box, in the bath, or on the kitchen floor, children use their bodies and minds to learn how this big, exciting, complicated, and wonderful world works.

Close-up: Figuring it Out

Kira, 20 months, is busy with her shape sorter. When her dad, Marcus, sees that she is starting to get frustrated, he gives a little help by putting his hand on hers. “Let’s turn the yellow square this way.” In it goes. “Yea!” says Kira as she claps her hands, clearly pleased with her accomplishment. Marcus encourages her to try some more, “One blue circle and one green triangle to go.” Kira picks up a square, shows it to her dad, and says “boo.” Marcus agrees, “Yes, that’s the *blue* circle.” Kira successfully drops it in. “Good job,” says Marcus, “how about a triangle?” But, Kira is ready for something new. She leaves the shape sorter and gets a book. “Are we done playing with shapes?” asks Marcus. “Okay, let’s read about animals.” Kira cuddles up with her dad and opens the book.

● **As Kira and her dad play, she is learning about:**

- ■ **colors, numbers, and shapes** as dad names them.
- ■ **communication and new words** as she and dad talk together while playing.
- ■ **imitation** as she copies what dad says and does.
- ■ **hand-eye coordination and problem solving** as she learns how to make the shapes fit into their spaces.
- ■ **self-confidence** as she masters a new skill.
- ■ **the joy of reading** as she and dad explore books together.
- ■ **building close relationships** as she experiences the pleasure of sharing her discoveries with dad.

Playtime for Young Toddlers

Running, Climbing, and Action Games

Oldies but goodies like “Ring Around the Rosie” and “London Bridge” encourage children to move, sing, listen, take turns, and cooperate. The park, playground, and backyard offer chances to run, climb, and play with other children. On a rainy day, try creating an obstacle course indoors.

Let's Do It Again ... and Again ... and Again ...

Through repetition, toddlers figure out how things fit together and work. They might fill and dump a pail over and over to learn about full and empty and in and out. They may want you to read the same book, and sing the same song, night after night. This kind of repetition helps children know what to expect. This gives them a sense of security and control over their world. It also helps them master new skills, which boosts their self-confidence.

Name That Tune

Now that your child can imitate words and melodies, he'll love to sing songs and have you read books with rhyming words. Words are easier to learn when they rhyme or are put to music. See if your toddler knows the next word in the song by pausing before you sing it. Dance to the music. This is a wonderful way to exercise those arms and legs and to experience the joy of movement. Offer musical instruments so he can make his own music, too.

Busy Hands

Young toddlers love to make things work. They use their hands and fingers for pushing buttons, opening boxes, and turning pages. This allows them to do everything from getting the music box to play their favorite song to exploring a treasured book. Many children also like to finger paint, color, play with play dough, or squeeze water out of a sponge.



Q I love that my 18-month-old wants to play with other toddlers, but there always seems to be a battle over a toy. How can I help her share?

A Sharing is a skill that takes a lot of time and practice to develop. Most young toddlers do not know how to share. It may seem like your daughter should share because she can do other things, like understand “no” and follow some directions. However, young toddlers do not yet have self-control. And, they are still learning about the feelings of others. You can help her learn to share over time by playing turn-taking games and also by modeling how you share things with her.

Social Butterflies

24 to 36 months



Older toddlers, with their physical abilities, problem-solving skills, and love of language, are eager for playmates. Months earlier, they may have watched others playing, or even played side-by-side with another child. Now, they are beginning to play together... sometimes even without fighting! Children with older siblings may have had a chance to practice turn-taking and other social skills. For a first or only child, however, this can be a challenge. Your toddler will develop social skills with time, practice, and your guidance.

During this third year, there is also a big leap in toddlers' ability to use their imaginations. They no longer just use their toy broom to sweep. It becomes a dance partner or a cowboy's horse. Two-year-olds often spend a lot of time in pretend play with friends. As they approach three, they begin to make up stories and "rules" for their games. Pretend play also helps children work through difficult experiences, like saying good-bye to a parent at child care.

Close-up: Pretend With Me

Tanya is watching her almost-three-year-old daughter, Maria, play with her friend Ben. They are pretending to be kittens. Mom helped them draw whiskers using her makeup. Their tails were once stockings. Maria and Ben crawl around on all fours and "meow." Tanya sets a shoebox "bowl" of imaginary milk on the floor. "You'll have to take turns like nice kitties do." Maria and Ben giggle in between slurps. Maria then notices that Ben's tail is longer. "I want the big tail!" she shouts as she grabs it. Tanya steps in, "Stop, Maria. You cannot take Ben's tail!" Tanya decides to redirect them by suggesting they make new tails out of paper that they can decorate. Maria and Ben happily get to work.

- **When Tanya joins Maria and Ben in play, she helps them develop:**
- ■ **creativity** as they make their kitty costumes.
- ■ **language skills** as they talk together while they play.
- ■ **sharing** as they take turns "drinking" their milk.
- ■ **self-control** as Tanya helps Maria understand limits.
- ■ **problem-solving skills** as Tanya helps them work through the tail crisis.
- ■ **understanding of symbols** as they use the shoebox in place of a bowl. This will help them get ready to learn skills that require symbolic thinking like reading and math.

Playtime for Older Toddlers

Family and Friends

Invite a friend over to play. Visit the neighborhood park or a cousin's home. This gives your child a chance to play in ways that expose her to many cultures. These are also great opportunities to act as your child's coach in helping her learn to share and resolve conflicts. She can learn new skills by watching other children, too.

Say It With Music

"Statue," "Freeze," and "Hokey-Pokey" are fun musical games. They offer opportunities to listen and follow directions. They also teach about words and sounds and allow children to move and exercise their bodies. Toy drums, tambourines, and other instruments add to the fun.

Quiet Play

A child's play doesn't always have to be full of action. Looking at books, listening to stories, and drawing pictures all build your child's imagination and language skills. Many children enjoy playing with sand, mud, or dough. These activities can be soothing and relaxing. Providing art supplies like paper, crayons, and paints will let them create with their hands.

Act It Out

Encourage fantasy play by providing dress-up clothes and other props. Use items like hats, scarves, backpacks, bowls and containers, music makers, and whatever else you and your child can find. Join the fun. When you get involved, you can help her expand on her ideas and also learn about her thoughts and feelings as she acts them out through play.



Q My 2-year-old is so shy. He won't leave my side, talk to anyone, or try anything at our new playgroup. How can I help him open up?

A Children are born with their individual way of experiencing the world, known as their temperament. It sounds as if your son, like many kids, needs time and support to feel safe in new situations. Try talking in advance about what the new experience might be like and inviting one of the children over to play. Once you are there, explore together, talk about what the other kids are doing, and join another parent and child in an activity. Taking a slow and sensitive approach should help your son feel more comfortable in new situations.

Choosing a Good Toy

Q When I walk into the store, I am overwhelmed by the videos, computer games, and other electronic toys that claim to make babies smarter. How do I know what to buy?

A Don't be fooled by the "make your baby smarter" claims. There is no research that shows that these products boost a child's brain power. In fact, safe household items — such as plastic bowls for filling and dumping, pillows for climbing or making a cave, and old clothing for dress up — are great learning tools. Classics like blocks, dump trucks, stuffed animals, and objects that imitate "real life" such as toy hammers and play kitchens are great for developing the imagination. And don't forget about books! The more a child has to use his mind and body to problem solve and develop his own ideas, the more he learns.



Here are other types of toys that can be helpful for learning. While they are categorized by age range, you will find that many will be useful at various stages.

Birth to 9 months: Toys that engage your baby's senses, such as mobiles, rattles, chew toys, and chunky board and cloth books. Toys that help him learn cause and effect, such as pop-up toys and busy boxes.

9 to 18 months: Toys that imitate real life, such as plastic tools, play food, and animal farms. Problem-solving toys that help children learn how things fit together, such as shape sorters and nesting cups. Push and pull toys and balls also let toddlers move their active bodies.

18 to 36 months: Materials that help them use their hands to create, such as play dough, crayons, and finger paints. Objects that help children use their imaginations, such as dress-up clothes, action and animal figures, dolls, and stuffed animals.

Remember...

You make a difference in how much your child learns through play.



■ **Join in her play.** Delight in her discoveries. When learning takes place in the context of loving relationships, children become eager, lifelong learners.

■ **See what your child is trying to do or figure out.** Think about all he may be learning, such as sinking and floating when he drops different objects into the bathtub.

■ **Provide the support she needs to accomplish her goal.** Does she need you to lift her up to touch an interesting object; stand behind her to help her make it up the stairs of the slide; provide more blocks to make a taller tower?

■ **Present new challenges when you see he is ready.** When he's learning to crawl, move a desired object a little farther away so he can experience the power and joy of movement. When he's entering the world of pretend, suggest that his stack of blocks might also become a barn for his play animals.

■ **Be spontaneous and have fun.** Playing should not feel like work. It should be a joyful, exciting time that you and your child share. So relax and enjoy yourself. Play is good for you, too.

For more information on how your child learns through play and what you can do, go to:

www.zerotothree.org/play



Dear Parents:

Play is fun and important to young children's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development. Through play, children learn problem-solving, interpersonal skills, communication, and other skills integral to success in school and life.

Play is also important because it involves you. Perhaps nothing is more essential and rewarding than the enjoyment your child experiences from time spent playing with you.

This brochure discusses how children learn through play, how different types of play support development, what toys are most useful, and your role in supporting your children through their daily play.

MetLife Foundation is pleased to partner with ZERO TO THREE to bring this brochure to you and to support you and your child as you have fun and learn in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,



Sibyl Jacobson
President
MetLife Foundation

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www.zerotothree.org

Play for the Brain

“The first years last forever,” experts advise parents. Modern imaging techniques show how early experiences have long-term consequences by helping to determine the actual *structure* of a child’s brain. It’s as if what happens in early childhood is written on stone, as compared to later experiences, which might be likened to tracings in the sand, or even writing on water, as we get older.

While you, as a parent, might welcome expert confirmation that the enriched environment you provide will have a lasting influence on your child’s future, you might also be feeling a bit intimidated by the heavy responsibility. The following simple guidelines will help reassure you that you are up to the job...and you don’t need a degree in child psychology or a toy store in your basement!

Learn about child development

When you have a general picture of what children can do at different ages, you can avoid feeling unnecessarily disappointed or frustrated. It’s unrealistic to expect that your one-month-old infant should be able to shake her fancy rattle or that your ten month old should be interested in making a tower of blocks.

Knowing what to expect will also help you provide appropriate games, toys and activities at the right time. If you read that at eleven months most babies can pinch things between their thumb and forefinger, you will put some Cheerios or frozen peas on a tray so they can try out this new skill. If you know that language learning starts at or even before birth, you will talk, sing and read stories to your baby long before he or she can use words him or herself.

Look for information about typical stages in free pamphlets at public health clinics or family resource programs. Parenting magazines also often present easy-to-read articles on the subject. For more details, ask your librarian for books or web sites on child development.

Follow your child’s lead

Books and articles will tell you what is within the range of “normal” behaviour, but each child is unique. What interests your particular child? The books may say that massage is good for infants, but if your son squirms and turns away after five

minutes, he’s saying he’s had enough. If your toddler is more involved in knocking down towers than in building them up, leave your demonstration of elaborate castle construction for another day. If your child becomes fascinated by dinosaurs, look at the library for books or videos on the subject.

When you follow the child’s lead, you increase learning potential, and at the same time, you strengthen the attachment between you. Your attentiveness says, “What interests you is important to me. I care about you and I want to get to know you better.”

Keep it simple

Just because brain researchers use high tech equipment doesn’t mean you need high tech toys to stimulate brain development. Computer games develop hand-eye coordination...and so does stringing pasta on a shoe lace. Experiencing the real world through *all* the senses creates the brain connections that will make learning at school come more easily later.

Similarly, development of the emotional and social parts of the brain depends on relationships with real people. A video may entertain a child, but when a caring adult tells or reads a story, cuddled up with a child at bedtime, they are laying the basis for future “emotional intelligence”. An infant’s best toy is still a caring adult’s face.

Relax

If you find yourself rushing from playgroup to music lesson to gymnastics club and your child never has time to just play, you may be overdoing the enrichment. When stimulation becomes stressful, it *interferes* with learning, so leave time to relax.

Have fun

Encouraging brain development doesn’t mean sitting your three year old at a desk to trace over endless lines of printed letters...unless he or she is having fun playing school. Play remains at the heart of early learning. Children are naturally motivated to learn by exploring and manipulating their world. Caring adults help them to follow their interests by providing a safe setting and a responsive, stimulating environment. It can be as simple as having fun together.

by Betsy Mann

Supporting Children's Play

Children explore and discover their world through play, and the essence of play is free choice: deciding what to do, when and with whom to do it. In a world that is rapidly changing, children need to learn and to practise the skill of making choices while they play.

Adults can play *with* children (peek-a-boo with a ten month old) or can *organize* children's play (coaching a soccer team). They can also *support* children's play without being directly involved. Here are some suggestions for enriching youngsters' games while leaving control in their hands.

Make Time

- Give children free time after they have spent a whole day in structured activities. Their play helps them integrate what they've learned.
- Time spent at structured lessons (swimming, gymnastics, piano, etc.) is not play time. Children can learn skills they will use later in play, but the essential element of free choice is missing during the lessons themselves.

Provide Space

- Baby proof your house so that your toddler can explore freely. Use the playpen for your four year old; he can take art projects and Lego constructions there to work on them out of baby's reach.
- Take children to a variety of play spaces, both indoors and outdoors. Local parks and family resource centres will stimulate different kinds of play.
- Put an old mattress in the basement to encourage acrobatics and develop gross motor skills.
- Play is rarely neat and tidy, so learn to put up with dirt and mess. Protect surfaces with newspapers and plastic cloths to make clean-up simpler. Make storage easy with shelves and transparent boxes at children's level.

Supply Materials and Equipment

- Expensive and elaborate toys are not necessary for children to have fun. A child may in fact be more attracted by the toy's packaging because her imagination can turn it into lots of other things.
- Adding a new element from time to time enriches the play environment and stimulates new interest. Try putting a garlic press on the playdough table. Join a toy library and bring home new toys each month.

- Become a collector of "loose parts"* that can be put together in different ways. Here are some examples: equipment like big blocks or different sizes of boxes, material like homemade playdough, props like small versions of tools, costumes like capes and hats, bits of "junk" collected in the park. All these allow children to play with ideas and explore possibilities while constructing their own toys.

Offer Companions

- Join in your children's play when you are invited, but remember to let them lead. They make the decisions and you follow.
- Invite friends over or bring your children to a play group. Another four year old will probably have a longer attention span for playing fireman than you do.

Give Feedback

- Once you've set the stage for play, just stand back and let it unfold. You might be needed to lift something heavy or to redirect unsafe play, but let children work through their own conflicts. When they are arguing, remember that working out *how* to play may be more important for them than actually getting down to the game.
- Respect children's efforts. Let them discover for themselves what works and what doesn't. They can't learn to solve their own problems if an adult is always doing it for them.
- Let children know you think their play is important. Don't interrupt unnecessarily. When it's time to stop, give them lots of warning.
- Weave a particularly successful play episode into a story to tell at bedtime. "Once there were some children who were all turned into mice by a magician in a red cape who said the magic words." Children will recognize their game and play it again.

Keep your own playful spirit alive. Nurture the child in yourself!

by Betsy Mann with notes from a workshop by Betty Jones of Pacific Oaks College, California.

*Simon Nicholson wrote "How Not To Cheat Children: The Theory of Loose Parts" in *Landscape Architecture*, 1971.