



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet

A photograph of a smiling family. A man with curly hair is holding a baby, and a woman with curly hair is smiling next to him. They are all looking at each other and smiling. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

Everyday Activities to Encourage the Development of Children (0-2 Years Old)

Parent Guidance

Parent Guide: Everyday Activities to Encourage the Development of Children (0–2 Years Old)

Babies grow and develop more in the first few years of life than at any other time. Babies learn to roll over, sit up, crawl, walk, talk, develop language skills, communicate and develop relationships with others and an awareness of the world around them. Parents are their child's first and foremost educators and research shows that being involved in your child's learning has a significant impact on their educational achievement with benefits that follow them into adult life. Recent research into babies' brain development has helped us to understand the importance of a child's first few years and the impact early experiences can have on their development progress.

We understand that parents of babies and young toddlers have many demands on their time. The aim of this factsheet is to offer you a range of ways in which you can support your child using the resources you have in the home and by using your usual daily routine that will naturally maximise learning possibilities.

Working with your child's key person

When your baby/toddler enters an early years setting they will be allocated a key adult - this person is referred to as the key person. Babies and toddlers need to build strong relationships with their carers as this allows them to feel secure, explore their environment and take risks with confidence. They can do this knowing that a trusted adult is there to support their learning, present new challenges in a safe environment and offer praise and encouragement, all of which help to build their confidence and self-esteem.

Sharing your knowledge and experience of your child with their key person in the setting will enable them to fully understand your child, so they can build on and improve their learning experiences and build strong bonds between your family and the setting.

What is a key person?

- A member of the nursery/pre-school staff team with responsibility for settling your child into the setting
- A key person is chosen to match your child's attendance pattern to provide continuity of care and development. They will develop an individual learning plan for your child and record their progress
- They will work with parents to learn about a child's home routines
- The key person will wish to hear about a child's routine, their likes and dislikes, their achievements, see photographs and hear news from home - so that this can be put into their personal learning journey, and they can plan further learning opportunities within the nursery and suggest ideas for at home

- It is a statutory requirement of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework (2021) that your child is allocated a key person.

The indoor and outdoor environments

- Get down onto your knees so you are at eye level with your child, to see what they are seeing and what they can access
- Have quiet times at home by turning off the TV and minimising distractions and noise where possible so that your child can concentrate on the task at hand and develop their concentration and listening skills
- Have toys and books accessible to your toddler
- When out in your community, point out the things that you can see and talk to your child about them, i.e. local shops, birds or transport. This will widen your child's vocabulary as well as giving them a sense of their community
- When friends and family visit, don't be tempted to put the children in front of the television or in another area to play. Include them in the chats or encourage them to play nearby and involve the visitors in their play. This will enable you to provide a good role model for developing social skills, e.g. interaction with adults and/or different ages of children. It will also build your child's vocabulary with a range of new words that they can experiment with later
- Both the indoor and outdoor environments are important for your child's development so try to ensure you and your child spend time outdoors every day.

Developing language

Language development is the key to all other areas of learning and development and an important tool for life. The most important and simple way you can support your child's language development is to talk, talk, talk to your child. Young babies will listen intently to their parents' voices and will store all of the vocabulary that they hear. They will hear how you use language to communicate with a range of different people and will recognise the different tones you use when you are happy, excited or upset. All of this will help your child to understand how language is used.

Stages of language development

(Information taken from 'Children's Communication Skills from Birth to Five Years,' Belinda Buckley and 'Early Years Care and Education,' Penny Tassoni and Kath Bulman).

Zero to three months

- Cries

- Looks at people/toys
- Facial expressions – smiling/frowning
- Looks at the person talking
- Startle response to loud, sudden noises
- Cooing/gurgling.

Three to six months

- Crying/laughing
- Babbling
- Recognises own name
- Looks at what an adult is looking at
- Takes part in back and forth vocalisation games with adults
- Explores objects by looking and touching
- Seems to recognise the names of family members.

Six to 12 months

- Stops activity when their name is called
- Looks towards the speaker who calls their name
- Tuneful bubbles
- Gestures (usually points) and vocalises to request thoughts
- Gives object to another person when asked to
- Responds appropriately to some verbal requests ('say bye-bye')
- Begins to use early words.

12 to 24 months

- First words appear at around 12 months
- Understands some longer sentences
- Starts to put two words together e.g. 'bye-bye, dog, Daddy come'
- Starts to say no
- Vocabulary increases.

(This is intended as a general guide, as each child develops at their own individual pace.)

Babies will begin communicating long before they have learnt to speak. They will use facial expressions (smiling/frowning), they will cry to let you know they need something, they may kick their arms and legs in excitement, they will begin to make cooing and gurgling noises to practice communication and as they grow and develop they will point to objects that they want. It is important to respond to any attempts at communicating that your baby makes, e.g. when they

'babble' talk back to your baby to show them that you are interested and listening to their communication attempts.

Mark making

The term mark making means a child's first attempts at writing, and it is important that they have lots of opportunities to practice mark making as this will help them with both reading and writing. You may already have noticed that young children become naturally curious about patterns that they make and their first attempts are often when sitting in a high chair after a meal - they may use their fingers in the spills on the tray to make patterns (they may pour liquid out of their beaker and then begin to make marks). Do not rush to clean up the spills; let your child explore the patterns and mark making opportunities, join in and talk to them about the shapes that you are making, what they look like or what they mean to them.

Mark making activities

- Paper and crayons
- Finger paint on a sheet of foil
- Tracing patterns or letters in a tray of sand/lentils or rice
- Use cornflour mixed with water to make shapes that disappear
- Chalkboard and chalk
- Driving toy cars through a plate of paint and then over a piece of paper
- Paints or soapy bubbles on a flat mirror.

Writing

Writing is an important communication tool and the opportunity to practice should begin at the earliest stage. Whenever you are writing, provide your young toddler with paper and crayons so that they can copy you, writing shopping lists, letters, emails and texts that you write. This will help them to understand that we write for a range of reasons and that writing can have an important purpose.

Writing activities

- Writing shopping lists
- Providing pens and paper at all times for your child to practice with
- Labelling packages and parcels
- Printing with ink pads
- Writing notes and messages
- Recording recipes
- Addressing envelopes
- Observing you sending text messages and emails

- Writing out menus.

Reading

Reading is important and helps to develop a child's vocabulary, listening skills, understanding that print has meaning and that reading is a pleasurable experience. Sharing a story with your child makes a huge impact on their reading ability and interest in reading books for pleasure. Babies will love to hear their parent's voice no matter what you are reading to them. Never worry about reading a story perfectly to your child; they will enjoy sharing time with you and looking at the pictures together.

- Introduce a range of books, poems and rhymes
- Encourage your child to join in with the familiar words/phrases
- Re-read your child's favourite parts/pages
- Once you have finished the story, encourage your child to re-tell the story to you
- Talk about their favourite characters
- Sit in a quiet space to share a book together
- Have board and cloth books for your baby to look at
- Talk about the pictures you can see and the story
- Use your child's favourite toys to tell them a story.

Language and communication

One in five children under the age of four has a television in their bedroom and parents have reported that children watching television in their bedroom has replaced a bedtime story. (Mintel research reported in Daily Mail March 2011). Watching television/DVDs is a very passive activity (it requires no interaction between you and your child) whereas reading is very interactive (talking about the pictures and story, joining in with the familiar words/phrases) so try to read a story to your child every day to give them the benefits mentioned above. Keep your books and stories in a place that your child can access independently and introduce waterproof books at bath time.

Language and communication activities

- Sing nursery rhymes and favourite songs together
- Waterproof books and alphabet letters at bath time
- Talk to your child about what you are doing during your day
- Visit the library to choose books or attend story time sessions
- Observe the signs in your community and point out things you see, such as local shops, birds, types of transport etc.
- Take time to listen and respond to your child when they are playing independently; ask them about their play

- Provide access to paper and pencils at all times
- Provide chalk for outdoor drawing
- Use paintbrushes and pots of water outdoors.

Physical exercise

- Take part in physical exercise every day with your child (go for a walk, go down to the park, throw a ball, dance to your favourite music together)
- Go swimming in the local pool
- Put objects just out of reach from your baby's grasp so they can try to stretch
- Tear paper into strips
- Provide a safe space so your baby can crawl around
- Play with soapy water with whisks and jugs
- Play games that encourage physical activity and increase their heart rate
- Roll out dough or pastry.

Healthy eating

- Sit and eat your meals together so you can be a good role model for your child in eating a range of healthy foods and sharing conversations and making mealtimes fun, relaxing social occasions
- Introduce new tastes/textures one at a time
- Be creative when encouraging your child to eat new/healthy foods – make food pictures (such as faces), add food colouring to change colours, puree vegetables and mix into the gravy
- Once you begin to wean your baby then introduce your child to a range of healthy foods
 - Do not give up if your baby or toddler does not like the new food at first as it often takes a couple of attempts to get used to new tastes/textures.

Good hygiene

- Clean and disinfect all utensils that you use with your child, i.e. bottles, cutlery, dummies/soothers, highchairs
- Explain to your child that washing their hands with soap will help to remove the germs and they can flush them away down the sink
- Wash your own hands before preparing meals and after changing your baby's nappy to stop the spread of germs
- Introduce hand washing routines to your toddler before meals and after messy play or toileting. Whilst washing your hands together, sing your child's favourite nursery rhyme twice before rinsing, which will enable a good clean and will remove germs present

- Starting good hygiene routines at this early age will help to develop good hygiene routines, particularly when children attend a childcare setting or school where illness and infections can spread easily if hygiene routines are not followed.

Physical development

Babies spend a lot of time lying on their backs in cots, pushchairs, car seats etc. Recent research showed that 19% of mothers with children under six months never put their baby on their front to play. Lying your baby on their 'tummy' each day can have huge benefits.

- Lie your baby on their tummy on the floor (on a mat or towel)
- Talk to your baby and play with them
- Babies who engage in tummy time each day are able to roll, crawl, sit, stand and walk earlier than babies that have not
- Lie in front of your baby to ensure they can see you and that they enjoy the experience
- Increase their movement skills and confidence for later crawling
- Encourage your baby to look at you
- If a baby is not interested or curious then they will become upset and will not be exercising the muscles that you intended
- Tummy time helps to develop a child's neck muscles, coordination and balance
- Introduce new objects so your baby stays interested and has fun such as using books, mirrors, rattles etc.
- As your baby grows, put things out of sight so your baby will have to roll over to reach them
- Share fun time together.

Supporting physical development

Children learn by being active, which also develops a positive sense of well-being, so try to make each part of your day an active time.

Provide areas to encourage your baby to explore movement, pull themselves up, crawl and climb freely. Space should not be a barrier to physical activities as you do not need a large space to do the following activities.

- Make up a small box/basket of natural resources from around your home, i.e. ribbons, containers, wooden spoons, crinkly paper, natural sponge, empty baby milk containers and clothes pegs
 - Offer the box/basket to your baby or toddler (sit the baby next to the basket so they can reach in and choose what they wish to play with)
 - You can regularly change the contents of the box/basket to ensure your child stays interested and explores new items. This will support your child's physical skills as they explore natural objects from around the home

- Dough, clay and plasticine are good for young children to manipulate and this helps their small muscle development. Buying dough can be very expensive so you can mix flour and water together and add food colouring if you have it. This mixture offers the same benefits as the expensive alternatives. Give your child rollers, cutters and various sized utensils to poke, prod and make patterns within the dough.

When you are outdoors, try to add a little extra time to your journey so that you can give your toddler the chance to get out of their pushchair and walk with you.

- Sing songs that encourage movement, i.e. head, shoulders, knees and toes (for babies and toddlers)
- With your toddler, you can ask them to follow your lead and jump, hop or skip on the spot or touch their feet/nose/ears etc.
- You can sit on the floor and roll a ball to your toddler and encourage them to roll it back to you
- Ask your toddler to hide their eyes while you hide one of their toys, then together you can search around the room until you find the missing toy
- Use a box or washing up bowl as a target and get your child to throw a ball (or a rolled-up pair of socks) into the target.

Take your baby out for a walk each day so they can take in the sights and sounds and smells around them.

- Touch parts of your baby's body and name them as you play: toes, hands etc.
- If you have access to a garden, then try to offer your child a chance to play outdoors each day. During winter weather wrap your child up warmly, put on a pair of wellies and take them outside so that your child can experience the different weather elements and experience splashing in puddles, crunching through autumn leaves and feeling snow on their face. This will keep children healthy, develop their physical skills and support their understanding of the effect that snow, rain and wind can have, discovering for themselves the awe and wonder of the world
- Use music to encourage your baby or toddler to explore moving their body; you can join in too and share the activity.

These activities will encourage physical movement, coordination, balance and help introduce them to new language whilst you have fun together.

Supporting your child's personal, social and emotional development

Taking your child out into your community and visiting friends/relatives will support your child's social skills. They will learn important interaction and communication methods by mixing with a range of different adults and children. They will begin to get a sense of themselves as a person and begin to realise that they are an individual in their own right

with likes and dislikes. Being a confident, self-assured child comes from being able to make your own decisions and choices and benefits them in later life.

- Offer choices e.g. 'Would you like a banana or an apple for snack?' and 'Which jumper would you like to wear today?'
- With young babies, you can support this by offering a choice of two toys and observing which one your baby reaches for
- Do not overload your toddler with choices, begin with one at a time and give them lots of time to make their decision. This will help your child be confident with the decisions they make.

Further information

- No cook playdough recipe - <https://bit.ly/2RuB2L0>
- Literacy Trust - <https://bit.ly/3AbkcUK>
- Change4Life - <https://bit.ly/3a9nhtK>
- Treasure boxes arts and crafts - <https://bit.ly/2tV82Dd>
- Department for Education (2021) The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): <https://bit.ly/2XwGfYc>



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Factsheet

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NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets

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