

# 12 Things Every Child Needs for the Best Start in Life





The first five years of a child's life are an important time for children's growth and development..

As a caregiver, you have an important role in making sure your child has the best start in life. Try these **12 THINGS** to help your child grow. Find what works best for you and your child.

**HAVE FUN AND PROMOTE YOUR CHILD'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT!**



## 1. ENCOURAGE INTERACTION

Babies and children are eager to connect with you. Every opportunity to interact with your child is an opportunity to support their brain development and show them you care. The more interaction a child has, the healthier their development will be.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Rock your baby and look into her eyes.
- Talk and sing to your baby in a soft, slow voice. Respond to her baby talk.
- Get down to your child's level. Get involved in her play and conversation.
- Quickly respond to your child's needs. Comfort your baby whenever she cries.

## 2. READ TO YOUR CHILD

Reading demonstrates a love for books and is a wonderful way to spend time with your child. Reading also promotes your child's speech, communication and concentration skills.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Read to your child every day.
- Talk while you read. Ask your child questions about the story and pictures.
- Write down a story your child tells you. Show him his words in writing.
- Follow words with your finger to make a connection between the written and spoken word.



## 3. PROVIDE A STABLE RELATIONSHIP

A stable relationship is predictable and loving. It allows children to depend on you and helps them feel safe and secure. Children with a stable relationship are more successful in learning and managing their behaviors.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Be nurturing and calm when interacting with your child.
- Help your child manage new situations and people such as a doctor's visit. Hold her in your lap. Explain what to expect beforehand.
- Be a loving and regular presence in your child's life.
- Create an environment that allows your child to explore. Set limits that show guidance and care.

## 4. DEVELOP SELF ESTEEM

Self-esteem is like a child's armor against the challenges of the world. It helps a child feel successful. When children have a strong self esteem, they are able to have healthy relationships and cope with challenges.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Show your child how much you love her every day.
- Praise your child with specific examples: "Thank you for putting away your stuffed animals. That was very helpful!"
- Focus on good behaviors. Gently correct mistakes and set limits.
- Discover who your child is. Appreciate your child for being unique.





## 5. PROMOTE PLAY

Playing lets children use their imagination and creativity. Children also learn about the world through play, try new skills and improve their communication.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Make playtime a part of every day.
- Play peek-a-boo.
- Be your child's playmate. Let your child choose and lead your play together.
- Get to know your child through play.



## 6. SUPPORT EMOTIONAL GROWTH

Children with healthy emotional growth are able to express and manage a lot of different emotions. They are able to cope with transitions and respond to emotional or stressful situations.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Help your child understand their emotions. For example, "I think you are mad because I turned off the TV. It's okay to feel mad. Would you like to read a book?"
- Be a good role model for managing emotions.
- Listen to and respect your child's feelings and fears. Explain what is real and what is pretend.
- Encourage your child to solve his problems. Offer help when there is conflict.



## 7. ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION

Children start to learn languages from the moment they are born. Communicating with your child shows that you love them. It also promotes your child's speech, communications and reading skills.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Engage your child in conversation. Listen and ask questions.
- Use your home language. Speak to your child in different languages if you can.
- Explain things that happen in simple terms. "I'm changing you into your pajamas. After you are changed, you will go to bed."
- Use different words to expand your child's vocabulary.

## 8. ENCOURAGE ART, MUSIC & DANCE

Art, music and dance are great ways for your child to express their feelings and show their individuality. They also support your child's brain development through new experiences and new ways to think.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Play music in your home. Sing, clap and dance with your child.
- Encourage your child to draw and make art projects.
- Help your child make music using household items.
- Encourage your child to create art, dance and music in their own way.



## 9. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Sometimes being a parent can be overwhelming and exhausting. If you don't take care of yourself, you will have a hard time taking care of your child.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Talk to friends, family or a doctor. Don't be afraid to talk about how you are feeling.
- Look for support programs for parents and caregivers.
- Take a break. When you are overwhelmed, ask for help from friends or family.

## 10. GIVE PHYSICAL AFFECTION

All children need touch and affection. Physical affection communicates love and promotes healthy emotional growth.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Hold your baby when feeding him.
- Hug and cuddle your child often.
- Hold your child on your lap when playing or reading.
- Hold your child's hand when walking.



## 11. PROMOTE HEALTH AND SAFETY

There are a lot of things you can do to help your child grow up healthy and stay out of harm. Here are just a few examples.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Child-proof your home. Use the right car seats for your child's age.
- See the doctor and dentist regularly. Be up-to-date on immunizations.
- Provide your child a healthy and nutritious meals.
- Encourage outdoor play and exercise.



HELP ME GROW IS A FREE SERVICE FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AGES 0 – 5 YEARS.

Multi-lingual staff can answer your questions about your child's development. They can also help you get connected to services and supports for your child and family.

Call  
1-888-510-1211

\*Information taken from "10 Things Every Child Needs" DVD, produced by Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation.

## 12. CHOOSE QUALITY CHILD CARE

Finding a quality childcare setting is important. A good quality childcare will encourage your child's development and learning in all the ways listed above.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Be active in choosing childcare. Give yourself time to find the right one.
- Visit the childcare center with your child to see how comfortable your child is.
- When visiting a center, ask yourself:
  - Is it a clean, safe environment?
  - Do educators play on the floor with children?
  - Do educators speak respectfully to children?
  - Do educators enjoy being with children?
  - Does the center welcome your involvement?

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