

Supporting Child Development through Family Connection

Margaret E. Machara, PhD, CFLE; Professor, Department of Human Sciences

Beatrice Harris, PhD; Associate Professor, Office of Retention

Families are children’s first and best teachers. As they grow older, children gain skills in how they use their small and large muscles (physical development), how they think (cognitive development), how they understand and control themselves (emotional development) and how they relate to others (social development). Activities at each stage can support growth in all domains of development* in fun ways!

Infants (0-1Yr)-What Infants Can do

Physical: support their heads, lift up their head and chest, sit, roll over, crawl, stand, maybe walk, use their whole hand to pick things up , maybe use the thumb and first finger to grab items.

Cognitive: recognize familiar people/objects, imitating sounds, maybe say first word

Social-Emotional: sense of self as an individual, express frustration and embarrassment, sadness when familiar people are gone



Activities to Support Infant Development

- ◆ Talk to your infant (SD, ED, CD)
- ◆ Sing songs (SD, CD)
- ◆ Describe items and actions around them (CD)
- ◆ Place toys within grasp (PD)
- ◆ Show items that sound, feel, look, and smell differently (CD)
- ◆ Rub lotion into their body parts while you flex their muscles and describe your actions (SD, CD)

Toddler (2-3yrs)-What Toddlers Can Do

Physical: stand, walk, run, stack and manipulate toys, scribble and draw

Cognitive: longer memories, organize thoughts and connect concepts, bigger vocabulary, better conversation skills

Social-Emotional: better sense of their identity, copying behavior they see, asserts own opinions and preferences, empathy for others but still have a hard time controlling emotions



Activities to Support Toddler Development

- ◆ Play Simon Says (SD, CD, PD)
- ◆ Work a large piece, floor puzzle (CD, PD)
- ◆ Paint using string, truck wheels, etc. (PD)
- ◆ Make a picture with stickers (PD, CD)
- ◆ Read a book together and ask them about the things going on in the pages (CD, SD)
- ◆ Walk around the neighborhood and point out familiar people or things (CD, PD, SD)

*Cognitive Development (CD); Social Development (SD); Emotional Development (ED); Physical Development (PD)

Preschool (3-5) yrs-What Preschoolers Can Do

Physical: better coordination of actions, run, jump, throwing, write, better self-care ability, tie shoes, get dressed, brush teeth and hair

Cognitive: better eye-hand coordination, understand rules, apply knowledge to new settings, basics of math, science and writing

Social-Emotional: more complete view of who they are, more socially and emotionally mature, conversations, cooperative play, absorb ideas of self-esteem and gender roles



Activities to Support Preschool Development

- ◆ Make an obstacle course in your home (PD, CD)
- ◆ Write down a story they tell you (CD)
- ◆ Play hot potato with a ball (PD, SD)
- ◆ Bake cookies together (SD, PD, CD)
- ◆ Make a face and have the other person guess the emotion (ED, SD)
- ◆ See how many rhymes you can come up with for a suggested word (CD)

School-Age (6-12 yrs)-What School-Agers Can Do

Physical: increased strength and coordination, organized sports, very confident in self care tasks, competent in writing and drawing

Cognitive: better focus and memory, larger vocabulary, more detailed learning in school subjects

Social-Emotional: more mature social skills and ability to control emotions, more stable friend groups, better understanding and response to social cues, moral understanding, more understanding of personality and skills



Activities to Support School-Age Development

- ◆ Play "I Spy" (CD)
- ◆ Create a scavenger hunt (CD)
- ◆ Sew a family quilt together (SD, PD, CD)
- ◆ Learn some yoga poses (PD)
- ◆ See how long you can keep a balloon in the air as you bat it back and forth (SD, PD)
- ◆ Ask the other person a question and try to guess their answer before they tell you (CD, SD)

Teen (13-18 yrs)-What Teens Can Do

Physical: stronger muscles, more agility adult body shapes, puberty

Cognitive: logical and analytical thinking, more complex knowledge in school subjects, more aware of societal issues

Social-Emotional: self-conscious, trying out different images, autonomy and privacy are important, intense romantic relationships, developing a sexual identity



Activities to Support Teen Development

- ◆ Go for a hike out in nature (PD, CD)
- ◆ Make up a line dance together (PD, SD, CD)
- ◆ Make something out of air dry clay (PD)
- ◆ Plant a yard or patio garden (PD, CD)
- ◆ Choose and bake a new dish for dinner (PD, CD)
- ◆ Make a family tree with pictures used to represent the people in the family instead of pictures (SD, CD, PD)

Children learn through fun activities with people they love and trust. Families know the individual differences of their children best and can find fun ways to help them grow and develop. Supporting families as their children grow and change is the best way to support children.