

growing & learning in the family

The first and most important learning in a child's life happens within the family. Children learn from the way people treat them and from what they see, hear and experience as soon as they are born. Children are natural learners and between birth and five years they grow and learn at the fastest rate of their lives. It is easy to see the enormous opportunity parents, and those who care for children, have in these early years to help shape children's learning before they start school.

Ways of learning

There are many ways of learning. Children learn by watching, by listening and especially by doing. All children go through a number of stages but there are differences between children within each stage. There are also differences in the length of time it takes for children to move from stage to stage. Children will thrive in an environment which is interesting and where they feel loved and safe.



Self-esteem

This is most important to learn - it is learning about who you are as a person and how you feel about yourself. Feeling valued, wanted and respected leads to feeling good about yourself and being confident. Once children have this confidence they can try new things, explore their world, cope when things go a bit wrong and feel that they have a chance to do well.

You help build your children's self-esteem when you:

- show them that they are lovable and loved
- support them in trying new things
- show them that you enjoy being with them and want to spend time with them
- help them learn new skills and praise them when they try these out.

Social development

Young children are beginning to learn about feelings and how to get on with other people long before their social skills are advanced.

You help your children:

- learn about feelings by explaining them e.g. "That makes you sad, cross or happy" as a result of something happening
- learn about feelings by explaining to them how others may feel e.g. "It hurts my ears when you shout."
- learn about getting on with others when you care about others and when you care about your own children's feelings
- by talking to them and telling them what you are doing and why
- by letting them begin to help at home and be part of caring for the home - helping with collecting the mail, feeding animals
- by not trying to make them share before they are ready to. To a young child this doesn't seem like sharing - it just seems like taking their things.

Cultural understanding

Children need to learn that being different is OK - we are all different in one way or another.

Your children will learn from you to value all the different things they can learn from others.



Australian society has a rich cultural heritage which began with the first Australians, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. In Australia now there are over 150 different cultures.

Your attitude to different cultures will make a big difference to the way your children treat people from a different culture.

- You can help their cultural understanding by telling stories about your own family history and background and showing them you are proud of it.
- Talk about differences in other cultures and what we can learn from them.
- Give your children opportunities to see and take part in cultural events e.g. festivals, puppet shows, different foods and music.

Health and physical development

The foundations of good health are laid in the earliest years. Babies, toddlers and preschoolers are naturally active and they learn through their bodies long before they can talk.

- Give young children lots of opportunities for physical play - with some time outdoors every day if possible. Physical play helps them develop strength, balance and skills.
- Encourage them to use their hands e.g. cutting, threading, pasting, drawing. This may mean letting them get 'mucky' while they enjoy the 'feel' of different things.
- Borrow a number of books each time you go. If your child especially likes one and wants it over and over again, perhaps you might buy it as a gift.
- Make sure they get plenty of rest and healthy food.

- Take them to be immunised against diseases that could harm them.
- Teach them about safety around water and roads, but remember they are not yet old enough to protect themselves. They need supervision.
- Make sure your home (and any other home you take them to) is safe for young children.

Communication

Communication is one of the most important aspects of our daily life. It means understanding what we see, hear and read, and being able to give messages to others in ways they can understand. Children need words for thinking and learning.

- Have fun with words. Say or sing rhymes, songs and jingles.
- Tell babies what you are doing and ask toddlers and preschoolers for their ideas.
- Read and tell stories from when they are very young. Even babies get value from listening to your voice.
- One of the most important things you can do for your children is to talk with them and listen to them as they talk to you.

Creativity

Creativity is a child's special way of expressing ideas, thoughts and feelings. Young children are curious and full of ideas. Once they can move about they like to explore and do things in different ways. By accepting their ideas and the things they make, you are encouraging them to explore, take risks and have a go.

- Take them to entertainment for children - movies, face painting at the market, children's concerts.
- Encourage them to sing and dance.



Children learn from the way people treat them and from what they see, hear and do.

- Provide boxes and dress-ups for pretend play.
- Provide paper, paints and playdough.
- Collect bits and pieces such as leaves, feathers, paper and fabric for making things and then display what they make.

Thinking

Thinking involves looking and listening, questioning, trying things out and making decisions. Children need time to be able to try things over and over until they can work things out. Sometimes if they are getting frustrated they will need a little help from an adult.

You can help children think by:

- talking about things as you do them - "It's a long way so we'll go on the bus" or "I'm taking my jumper off because it is hot."
- giving them things to sort and match, coloured pegs or socks
- doing puzzles
- providing building toys so they can build things
- telling jokes and riddles.

Learning about the environment

Children enjoy playing in and exploring their natural world - backyard, park and beach. At the same time they are learning about their built world around them - roads, houses, shops, schools. They will learn from you if you tell them why you do things when you recycle, mow, weed or paint the house.

- Let your children explore outdoors. Lots of this learning is messy play with sand, dirt and water. Making a mess can be an important part of learning.
- Talk to them about trees, weather, birds, fish and animals.
- Look for tiny insects that live in the garden and encourage watching them without touching.
- Plant seeds and watch them grow.
- Watch a house being built (and explain why you need to watch from a safe distance).
- Explore new places together like trying a new park or walking around a different block in your suburb.

Technology

Technology is all around us and helps to make life easier. Things like scissors, kettles, bike pumps, washing machines, cars and computers are the result of technology. Technology is about using things to solve problems - how to sweep the floor or cut material.

You can help children think about technology when you:

- talk about the tools you are using and how they help you
- talk about different ways of doing things - make sure both boys and girls get the same chances to use things like hammers, brooms and computers
- talk about what you could do without technology, how to get to the shop without a car
- encourage thinking about how to use things to solve problems - how to carry things from one place to another.

Things you can do with children at different ages

baby (up to six months)

Your young baby is an active learner. From birth up to the age of six months a baby shows what they've learnt by turning their head towards sounds and movements; reaching up to hold their feet while lying on their back; smiling at familiar faces and voices; making different sounds; and putting everything in their mouth.

Young babies enjoy being with people - faces to watch, fingers to grip, skin and hair to feel, voices to listen to, and arms to be rocked in.

baby (six-12 months)

Your baby is getting stronger and starting to move about. In the second six months a baby begins to explore the world around them. This can be scary at first and they may be afraid when the people they feel safe with are out of sight.

Older babies will play happily with household items such as pegs, cotton reels, paper plates, used wrapping paper, spoons and plastic containers (but not plastic bags). They love things to crawl in and over.

early toddler (one-two years)

- Although unsteady on their feet at first, young toddlers love being able to walk and climb. Falling over, small bumps and bruises are common. Parents are important as the secure base for toddlers to return to when they need it.
- It is very important for them to do things for themselves and their first word may be "No". They are starting to use words to tell you what they want.
- Toddlers need room to explore and run. They need big things to hold and play with - big balls, blocks. They like simple ride-on toys and toys they can push and pull.

older toddler (two-three years)

- Your two year old always seems to be curious and on the move as they explore more widely. They will enjoy being with other children and learning to do more for themselves.
- Tantrums are common because they are not yet able to do the things they want to and they can get very frustrated. Speech becomes clearer and easier to understand.
- Two year olds enjoy dress-ups, ride-on toys, stories, rhymes, and copying their parents. They are not yet able to share so having more than one toy of the same kind can be helpful if they are playing near other children.

young preschooler (three-four years)

Your young child begins to engage in make-believe play. Learning how to get on with others is important to your child's development. This is a time when they ask many questions.

- Young preschoolers enjoy drawing, painting, play dough, making things, swings and playgrounds and lots of space to run in.

preschooler (four-five years)

Four year old preschoolers move well and enjoy physical activity. Their thinking shows in the things they say, draw, make and do.

- "Why?" questions are often asked. They are more able to see things from another's point of view.
- They love stories and funny words, building with large lego, painting, make-believe play and playing with others. They enjoy trying out their physical skills at playgrounds and problem-solving skills with simple computer games.

What parents can do

As parents you are in the best position to know what your children like and what they can do.

- Be positive with your children and encourage them to try new things in a safe environment.

Services for parents and children

- Parentline (8am to 10pm 7 days/week) **1300 301 300**
- Kids Help Line (24 hr) **1800 551 800**
- Community Child Health Service (24 hr) **3862 2333**
Outside Brisbane **1800 177 279**
- Child Care Information Service **3224 4225**
Outside Brisbane **1800 637 711**
- Women's Infolink **1800 177 577**
- *dvconnect* womensline (24 hours) **1800 811 811**
Domestic violence counselling and refuge placements
- *dvconnect* mensline (10am to 6pm) **1800 600 636**
Counselling, support and information

Your local library has a range of excellent books on parenting.

- Provide an environment where your children can explore, learn new things, try new things, practise what they can do and talk about what they are doing and learning. Teach them to watch, listen, think and question.
- Don't feel guilty about asking for information or support for your child or for yourself. Every child is different and every stage of development brings new challenges, so there may be times when you need advice or support.
- Give your children plenty of time to play. Play is important because it allows children to practise skills over and over again in their own time and to develop ideas at their own pace. While many toys bring great fun and challenges, play also can be provided without spending much money.

Play materials can come from many sources.

- Outdoors, there is sand and water, shadows, trees to climb and bushes to hide in.
- 'Junk' items can help imaginative play. Big cardboard boxes make cubbies or trains, food packages and advertising brochures are good for home or shop play, old clothes are for dressing up, old pots and pans and spoons are good for digging in the sand.
- Parks have swings, slides and spaces for running and ball play.
- Beaches have sand for digging, waves for chasing, stones, seaweed or shells for collecting.
- Libraries have books and music along with games and puzzles for thinking, sharing and learning about rules.

Try to find activities which will support your child's learning in the areas of physical and social development, thinking and communicating.

Look in your local White Pages for your Queensland Health Community Child Health Service and for information about their parent education courses (Positive Parenting Program - Triple P)

Adapted from information contained in the Parent Easy Guide Series © Parenting SA, Government of South Australia 2000.

Published by the Department of Communities. For reorders phone 3224 4225 if in the Brisbane metropolitan area or 1800 637 711 if outside the metropolitan area.

Tip sheets are also available from the Department of Communities website at www.communities.qld.gov.au



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