

Parenting News & Views



EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY RESOURCES

As a parent, you have several resources that you can go to for guidance and support. This could be a physician, counselor, trained professional, or simple resource checklist with basic information, such as the Children's Home Society of California (CHS) *Educational Brochures* or *Developmental Stages Wheel*. Having resources about your child's growth, health, and/or safety enables you to be a support and advocate for your child.

For example, you may need information about your child's physical development or language skills, or be interested in more details about the developmental milestones. Information in these areas can be simple or more complex, but having a place to start is often all you need.

Most counties in California have a 211 Resource and Information number that you can call from any phone. This service provides resources and gives you a link to community support. If you want more information regarding a health issue, developmental screening information, stages of development, appropriate discipline, or many other topics, the following websites are great places to start:

- www.cdc.gov/actearly
- www.cdc.gov/ncbddd
- www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones
- www.first5california.com/parents



YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Looking back at your childhood, you probably have many memories of situations and interactions that made an impact on who you are today. Oftentimes, we think that the moments that influence a child's growth the most, are those that are "planned or designed to teach" something. However, the opposite is actually true. Experiences that we discover through our own exploration are the ones that leave us with an everlasting imprint. As we evolve into parenthood, we often feel inadequate or unprepared for what lies ahead. Understanding how children grow and learn reduces some of the fear in parenting by helping parents realize that they do not have to be experts in order for children to thrive.

As a parent, you likely have expectations about how your baby should act or behave. This can be based on how you were raised or what you have observed with your family or friends who have their own children. Change occurs for all children in four areas of development: physical (size, weight, overall coordination); social (interactions and attachments with parents and others); emotional (feelings, expressions, and a sense of self); and cognitive (learning about our world/environment through all of our senses). These developmental guidelines give you general knowledge of typical progression as your child matures from infancy to adulthood. They occur at various rates and encompass many milestones along the way.

Developmental milestones assist parents and child care providers by giving general guidelines so that you can recognize any concerns regarding your child's health. The following is a brief overview of broad stages of development for the young child.

- During the **first six months**, babies are developing muscle control. They start to smile, respond to people, and begin to see themselves as unique.
- By the end of **one year**, many children are able to make sounds such as "ma" and "da," can distinguish between family members and strangers, and may be taking their first steps.
- During the **second year** of life, children may be using two- to four-word phrases, become more independent, and are more mobile and coordinated in their movements.

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RECIPE FOR A PLAYFUL AND RELAXING SUMMER

Having a hidden “bag of tricks” is always a good idea, especially when children are involved. Keep a tote in the trunk of your car with a few balls of various sizes, a jump rope, small board games, sidewalk chalk, and sand toys. This could turn out to be the best surprise on the weekend or warm summer afternoon at the park!

Dancing is also a wonderful way to spend time together, and it can be a diversion. Pop in a CD and dance away. You can even make a game out of it and play “Freeze Dance.” Even infants who are too small to dance will enjoy listening to the music, or they can be gently held in your arms while you dance.

When children of any age are involved, bubbles are always a great activity! Playing with bubbles can create a simple, relaxing playtime and encourage outdoor play, which is wonderful entertainment for summertime weather. What fun!

Bubbles:

8 cups cold water

1 cup dishwashing detergent (liquid)

1 tablespoon glycerin (you can buy it at your local pharmacy)

Mix all the ingredients. Let the mixture sit overnight. You can use pie pans for the bubble solution and make wands out of wire or old wire coat hangers. Strawberry baskets and the plastic rings from a six-pack of soda are fun to use too! Explore the options!



FUN WITH KIDS

BACK TO LEARNING: THE BASICS

As a parent, you strive to provide the best for your child and hope that she will achieve and do well in all she sets out to accomplish. When you compare growing up in today’s world, as opposed to 10 years ago, things have changed quite a bit. Computers, 3-D television, video games, and the media can all leave the impression that you need “stuff” in order for your child to grow and learn. But when it comes to kids and learning, a good “back to basics” philosophy of “less is more” really holds true. Together, you and your child can create fun, developmental experiences, without fancy toys or expensive technology.

Summertime provides the perfect foundation, with the warm weather and opportunities to spend a little more time together. Children learn more through play than from instruction. These moments can be magical and wonderful to observe. Even if you have children ranging from infancy through elementary school years, you can all participate together in the same activity. Of course the infant will not interact on the same level as the older child, however, you should never underestimate the learning power of a baby.

Knowing that children learn through play, the biggest challenge in today’s busy pace is to slow down and actually play with your child. Remember when you were young and enjoyed simply having a big box so that you could make a playhouse or tunnel? Or perhaps you spent time at the beach building a sand castle, then watched the waves make it “melt” away. Just think about the learning opportunities, including the conversations, that you and your child could continue to have about these experiences for days!

Looking at daily activities as if you are a child yourself will give you the freedom to grow and learn right along with your child. (This can also be a great stress reducer!) Imagination, curiosity, and creativity are like muscles; they must be used so that they will develop and grow. Encouraging these skills at an early age provides a strong foundation towards greater successes in the future.

Sources: www.earlychildhoodnews.com, www.workandfamilylife.com

TAKING CARE OF ME: SIMPLE TIPS TO HELP YOU RELAX

Being a parent is both a fulfilling and challenging experience. Whether you work, go to school, are a stay-at-home parent, or are single or married, how you feel can make all the difference in your day. There is such a difference between being relaxed, happy, and positively engaged with your child, versus feeling tense, frustrated, or angry.

Stress is different for every person and every family. It is neither good nor bad, it depends on how the person or family reacts to it. Physiologically, stress and anxiety are natural biological responses to feeling threatened. When we experience physical or emotional stress, the brain prepares to go into the “fight or flight” mode. It is a biological defense mechanism. Continual and chronic tension can cause sleepless nights, muscle tightness, increased or decreased appetite, feelings of depression, fatigue, illnesses... the list goes on. Relaxation techniques and activities aimed at alleviating the symptoms of stress will benefit you, and benefit your children as well.

There are ways to help cope with the anxieties of everyday life. You may have heard the phrase, “Breathe through it.” This is definitely key when it comes to relaxation. Typically, when we are tense or anxious we confine our breaths to our chest, instead of using our diaphragm. This actually increases anxiety. Inhaling through the nose and slowly exhaling through the mouth, while keeping your stomach relaxed, will help you to focus. This technique actually helps the central nervous system to tell the brain to calm down.

You can also try taking a mental vacation. You may not be able to really get away, but you can pretend, just like the kids do. Close your eyes and imagine a place or something that makes you feel good. Focus on that for a few minutes, along with your breathing, and you will notice a difference. It may not change the world or your day, but it will help you to take care of yourself in a positive manner.

Sometimes getting up and moving is the best medicine. Exercise and active play *with* your child have a dual benefit. You are happier and less tense, and your child feels more connected to you as a result of your time together. This, in turn, makes for a happier family and, of course, less stress for everyone.

Sources:

Ambrose, Ida. June 1993. *Mother's Perception of Stress: A Comparison of Exercisers*. California State University, Northridge;

“Stress Management for Parents.” Child Development Institute; www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/parenting/stress.shtml (accessed March 23, 2010).



AGENCY INFORMATION

For more than a century, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

To fulfill our mission, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, educational, and resource services, which include Community Education, Child Care and Development, and Family Resource Services. Along with helping children and their families, CHS is an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level.

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- During the **three- to four-year-old** phase, children are expressing themselves more verbally, can interact with other children by playing games or telling stories, and continue to grow in their physical skills by jumping, skipping, etc.
- As children mature into the **elementary school years**, they become more social and their peers are important to them. Physically they continue to develop and grow, and their desire to acquire knowledge and unique interests increases.

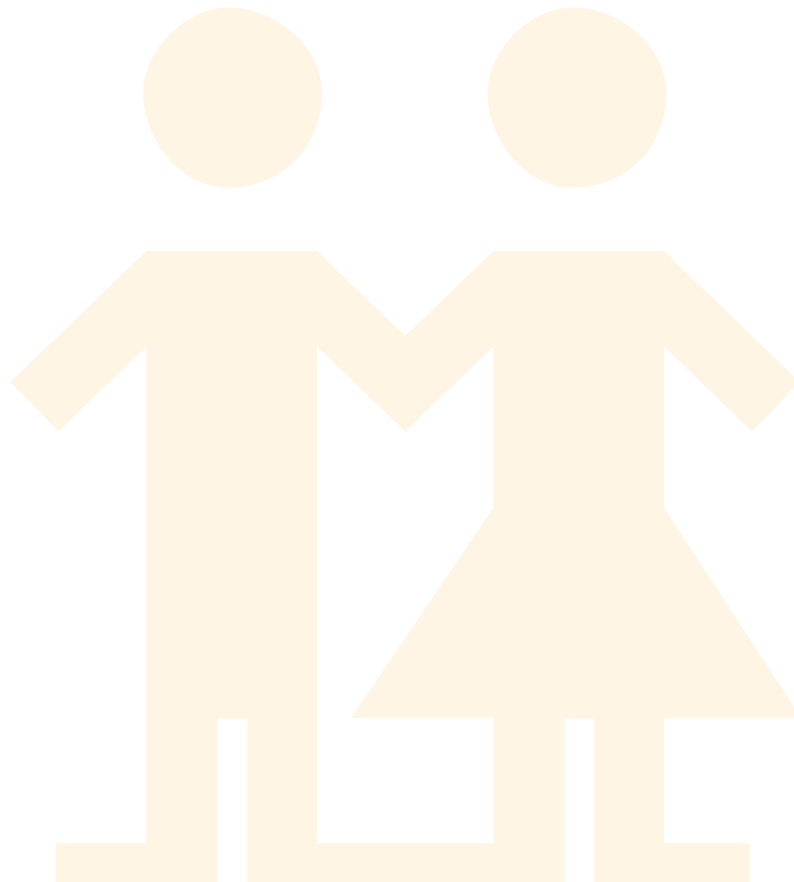
Play activities for babies and children have many positive benefits and contribute to the overall process of learning new things. The list is endless as to the types of interactions, games, and tasks that children can participate in. Open-ended activities that have more than one right answer encourage individuality and uniqueness for your child. It can be as simple as taking a walk with your child and talking about the different types of leaves on the trees, or singing a song together while driving to school or child care. Knowing what is appropriate for the stage and age of your child, while keeping in mind that no two children develop at the same pace, can help direct you towards providing and encouraging positive growth for your child.

When you consider this information about developmental milestones, stages and ages of development, and being a parent, it can be overwhelming. Knowing that we are all human and no one is perfect is the key to success for you as a parent, and for your child. There are many resources that exist to support and help parents understand more about how children grow and change through the course of life. If you have questions about your child's development or need more assistance, talking with your child's doctor, child care provider, or teacher is always a good place to start.

Sources: Goldberg, Sally. 1997. *Parent Involvement Begins at Birth: Collaboration between Parents and Teachers of Children in the Early Years*. Allyn and Bacon.



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