

# Parenting NEWS & VIEWS

EARLY LEARNING AND  
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

## Natural Learners

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Babies are born ready to learn. Eighty percent of the brain's growth happens in the first three years of life, and by age five the brain has grown to about ninety percent of its adult size. What we do in the first three to five years of a child's life can have a profound impact on their overall growth and development.

There are many things you can do to support your baby's intellectual, or cognitive, development. Providing rich experiences, encouraging them to explore with their senses, and giving them the time they need to process what they have learned are all things that help support intellectual growth. If a baby is comforted after crying, this experience teaches the baby that crying will bring an adult to meet his needs.



Infants and toddlers need to feel safe in order to learn. When an infant hears a loud noise, he will turn his head to the parent near him for reassurance that he is safe. A mobile infant who is startled or frightened will crawl to a parent when worried, and a toddler will bounce between playing and running back to an adult to make sure the person keeping him safe is there.

Research has shown that young children learn best when they have a "safe base" or person whom they can look to for reassurance and comfort. When you cuddle your baby or toddler, sing to him, hold him in your lap while you look at a book, and simply talk to him, you are building a positive relationship with him that lets him know he is

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### WHAT IS OUTSIDE?

Outside there is an interesting world to explore. Nature provides children the opportunity to expand their knowledge by using their senses to take in information and practice skills such as critical thinking, being curious and creative, exercising, and developing empathy for living things. Visit a neighborhood park, wilderness area, beach, or national park with your child and let the learning begin!

Many parks, beaches, and wilderness areas offer special summer camps and fun summer activities. Find outdoor areas near you by visiting [www.discovertheforest.org](http://www.discovertheforest.org).

You might also consider joining, or starting, a family nature club. To learn more, visit the Children and Nature Network website at [www.childrenandnature.org/connect/community-networks/](http://www.childrenandnature.org/connect/community-networks/). Remember to always check park websites for important visitor information before you leave.



# Homemade Play

Infants and toddlers are naturally curious and want to learn. You can easily use items around your home to create fun learning experiences for your child. Choose items that are safe. Do not use items that are small enough to be a choking hazard, or materials with sharp points or edges. Try dropping items through an empty paper towel tube. If the item falls through, you should not use it with your infant.

Young infants will observe and imitate the sounds and expressions you make as you talk and play with them. Start by looking your infant in the eyes while you gently talk, sing, or tell him stories. Allow your infant to explore different textures. Carry your infant outside and gently hold his hand against different surfaces such as wood, grass, stones, or leaves. Talk to him about how each object feels. Now explore textures inside such as carpet, curtains, pots, towels, and plastic.

When your infant is able to sit independently and begins to crawl you can both sit on the floor and play. If you have a blanket or sheet you can play peek-a-boo, or you can also place a few objects around that he can explore such as plastic dishes, wooden spoons, metal pots, colored socks, lids, larger rocks, and shakers. Make shakers by filling empty plastic water bottles with materials like small rocks, cotton balls, or dry rice, beans, or pasta. Put glue on the inside of the cap and seal it tightly.

Toddlers enjoy play that allows them to use their whole bodies, so turn on some music and dance! Offer your child the chance to draw with crayons on paper. Do not worry about how he draws on the paper; just give him the opportunity to explore what he can do with it. Go for a nature walk and look for bugs or birds. Allow your toddler to fill and dump clothes out of a laundry basket. Let him try to push and pull the basket across the floor. Visit your local library for the free story hours and read to your child every day.



## RECIPES Stovetop Mac & Cheese

Mac and Cheese is relatively easy to make and it tastes great too! The recipe below is for homemade Mac and Cheese that you can cook on the stovetop and have ready to eat in about 35 minutes. Remember to let children help by gathering and whisking ingredients together. Only an adult should use the stovetop and handle hot dishes.

### Ingredients for 6-8 Servings

- 1/2 pound elbow macaroni
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 2 eggs
- 6 ounces evaporated milk
- 1/2 teaspoon hot sauce
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Fresh black pepper
- 3/4 teaspoon dry mustard
- 10 ounces sharp cheddar, shredded
- Optional: mix in some raw or steamed veggies such as broccoli, cauliflower, or zucchini

### Directions

In a large pot of boiling water (with salt), cook the pasta to al dente and drain. Return the pasta to the pot and melt in the butter. Toss to coat.

Whisk together the eggs, milk, hot sauce, salt, pepper, and mustard. Stir into the pasta and add the cheese. Over low heat continue to stir for 3 minutes or until creamy.

Source: [www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/alton-brown/stove-top-mac-n-cheese-recipe.html](http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/alton-brown/stove-top-mac-n-cheese-recipe.html)



# Summer Safety

Outside play allows children to develop their muscles, balance, strength, and dexterity. It also provides them with fresh air, new learning opportunities, improved vision, a chance to be curious, and a positive frame of mind. To get the most enjoyment out of summer fun use the following tips to keep children happy, healthy, and safe.

## Car Safety

Use appropriate car seats and restraints when transporting children. Do not leave children under the age of 12 unattended in a vehicle. Within 10 minutes the heat inside your car will increase to 20 degrees hotter than it is outside, and severe heat exposure can result in serious illness or death. Place your briefcase or cell phone next to the car seat as a reminder to bring your child with you.

## Water Safety

Drowning can occur whenever there is enough water to cover the nose and mouth. Closely supervise children whenever you are near water, use flotation devices, enroll children in swimming classes, designate a specific person to be the "Water Watcher," and keep pools inaccessible when not in use.

## Sunscreen

Make sure children six months and older wear sunscreen when spending time outdoors. Sunscreen should be reapplied throughout the day. Consult with your pediatrician before using sunscreen on infants or children with skin rashes. Encourage children to wear hats and glasses to protect their heads, ears, face, and eyes.

## Insect Repellent

Mosquitos and ticks can carry harmful viruses and diseases. If you are visiting a wilderness area or allowing children to play in tall grass make sure to protect them from harmful bites and stings by using an effective insect repellent.

## Inspect Outdoor Play Areas

Prevent injuries by doing safety checks of playgrounds and outdoor areas before children begin playing. Look for hazards such as sharp objects, broken glass, stray animals, and strangers. Teach children that there may be times when there is an emergency and you need them to come to you immediately. Develop an emergency procedure such as blowing a whistle or calling out a special code word.

## Create an Emergency Kit

Be prepared! Put together emergency first aid kits for your home and vehicle. You can include some basic medical supplies such as bandages and antibiotic cream, a bee sting kit, bottled water, and snack bars. Consider taking a class in first aid or CPR from your local American Red Cross or American Heart Association trainer.

Discover more detailed information about summer safety by visiting the Centers for Disease Control's family web page at [www.cdc.gov/family/kids/summer/](http://www.cdc.gov/family/kids/summer/).



loved, valued, respected, and safe. A child who feels safe is more likely to feel naturally curious and explore his environment.

Some of the skills your baby will develop and practice as he grows are: cause and effect, spatial relationships, symbolic play, number sense, classification, and matching. Offer your baby a wide variety of experiences by reading books to your child, spending time outdoors, and choosing toys with different textures, colors, shapes, and sounds.

Infants learn about cause and effect from responsive caregivers. The infant cries and their needs are met. Mobile infants and toddlers experiment with cause and effect by manipulating take-apart toys, shape sorters, simple musical instruments, or toys with knobs, levers, slides, and latches.

Introduce your child to numbers and counting with songs like “One, Two Buckle My Shoe” or “Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed.” Hold up your fingers to represent numbers when you sing. As you prepare snacks and meals, encourage your child to use math-related words like “more” or “less.” Counting snack items, such

as raisins, with your mobile infant or toddler while you both eat helps your child learn about quantity and basic addition or subtraction.

Infants learn about spatial relationships from consistent routines. They begin to classify, or organize, by associating a familiar person with a specific task. Toddlers can use stacking toys, shape sorters, or baskets to nest and organize (classify) objects according to size, shape, volume, or color.

Symbolic play occurs when toddlers use objects, or their own bodies, to represent experiences. For example, he may say the box he is sitting in his “house.” Allow children to use stuffed animals or other inanimate objects in their play to encourage creativity.

Providing your child with rich experiences, relationships, and conversations will support his cognitive development as he grows from an infant to a toddler. Playing with your young child while he learns gives you the opportunity to enjoy your child and learn about his personality and interests. Make time for fun, and the learning will come naturally.

Source: Research on brain development was accessed from [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org).

ABOUT CHS

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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