

Hello, Parent!

Welcome to parenthood, a journey like no other. Your child is special and truly one of a kind, like your experience as a parent. Keep this in mind as you watch your child's growth from day to day. As your baby or child grows, some changes may come quickly and others more slowly. Parenthood will take you through times of challenge and times of joy. One thing is true—life will never be the same! Best wishes to you.

During these early years, you may have concerns about your child's growth, health, or behavior. Make sure to talk to someone, such as a doctor or teacher, about your concerns. Parents all need help now and then. You know your baby best. Concerns and questions about your baby are never silly.

These activities are designed to give you ideas for fun things to do that support your child's learning and growing. Activities can usually be done with just your face and voice or what you have around the house. Many things can be done during the times you are busy with your child anyway, such as mealtime or bath time.

You may notice that there are not any activities that include "screen time" (e.g., movies, television, computers). Studies have shown that too much screen time is linked to later problems with attention, learning, and difficult behaviors. Your baby's brain is growing so fast between birth and 5½ years of age. Activities with real people and real things will help your child learn to talk and listen, move his or her body, and solve problems. Your child can't learn these things from watching television or playing video games.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you try the activities and interact with your child:

- **Be ready to play!** Activities should be fun for both of you. Make sure your child is happy, rested, and not hungry—and that you are, too!
- **Change it.** If a game or activity doesn't work for you, change it around to fit your style, or use what you have on hand that's appropriate.
- **Try family favorites.** You may remember some games or songs from your own childhood. Your child will love these, too. Even though they may not appear on an activity sheet, passing on your very own songs and rhymes to your baby is special and important.
- **Join in the fun.** Invite other family members or friends in some of the games and activities. They will probably enjoy getting to know your child, and your child will get to know more about special family and friends.

Don't forget safety! Children are too young to know what is safe and what is not. Your close attention is important to make sure they stay safe while playing and learning.

- Always watch babies and young children in or around water.
- Pay close attention to games or play time while your baby is on his or her stomach. For the first few months, your baby's neck muscles may not be strong enough to lift his or her head and clear the nose and mouth to breathe. Always put baby to sleep on his or her back.
- Always watch any play with strings, cords, long scarves, or anything that might wrap around your child's head or neck.
- Although balloons are fun for children's play, even a deflated balloon can be a choking danger. After playing with balloons or when a balloon breaks, remove it from children right away.
- If you let your child play with a mobile phone, make sure the batteries are removed. Experts are still unsure how mobile phone use may affect the brain, so it is best to be careful.
- Ask your doctor about food allergies. We have tried to avoid any activity that includes foods that may cause an allergic reaction. However, all babies are different, so be alert.

Enjoy your parenting journey! Take a little time each day just to relax with your child and be playful. Your child grows up only once, so these years—although tiring and challenging—should be filled with joy and pleasure.
