

Helping Your Child Grow

Activities for 33 to 42 months



33-42 months

Spend time cuddling and playing with your child every day. This is especially important if you have been away from each other during the day. Your child missed you and needs to reconnect! Give them 10 minutes of one-on-one time soon after you come home from work. Sit down, breathe, and hold your child. Let them know how much you missed them. Ask your child about their day. That little bit of focused time will help them feel secure and calm. Without this, your child may become fussy or act out to try to connect with you.

Night-Night Talk Times

Bedtime is a special time to get close and connect with your child. Talk about the day and what will happen tomorrow. Ask them simple questions about their day: "What was the best part?" "Were there any hard parts?" "How did you feel?" Listen carefully so your child knows that what they are thinking is important to you. You may need to help them get started talking. Even if your child can't answer all your questions, they are still listening and learning how to think about their day.

Puppet Friends

Your child is discovering their imagination. Through pretend play, they can explore different feelings and imagine they are someone (or something) else. Maybe your child wants to be a superhero, a fairy, a cat, or a police officer. One fun way to do this is with puppets. You can make a simple puppet from a sock or a small paper bag. Draw eyes and a mouth with a marker, cut out ears, and glue on yarn for hair. Make one puppet for your child and one for yourself. Have your puppets go on adventures together and explore their world.

Feelings Faces

Draw simple pictures of faces that show feelings, such as happy, sad, mad, surprised, or scared (emojis are good examples!). Talk about these feelings with your child. Have them point to the face that shows how they feel on the inside. Ask your child why they are feeling that way. Then have them point to one that shows how someone else may be feeling: "Can you point to the picture that shows how you think your baby brother is feeling?" "Why do you think he's feeling that way?"

Nature Walk

Go on a nature walk with your child and take turns showing each other interesting things. Be curious together! Everything is new and interesting to them. Pick up a bug that is safe to handle and talk about it. You can talk about how the bug looks or feels. "Look at this little red ladybug. Its legs feel tickly on my hand. Do you want it to hold it?" Now it's your child's turn to find something interesting. They may be scared of new things. Teach your child which things are dangerous and which ones are safe.

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How Does It Feel?

Stay close by when your child is playing with another child. At this age, children need help sharing and taking turns. Use conflicts and disagreements as learning opportunities. Ask your child to think about how their friend may feel. "Maria, you have all the dolls. Look at Alma's face. How do you think she feels?" Encourage them to try to solve this problem: "What would help Alma feel better?" When your child does show signs of caring for others, make sure you notice: "You shared your doll with Alma. What a kind friend you are! Nana is very proud of you."

Story Time

Ask a librarian to help you find some children's books about feelings. Reading stories about feelings helps your child think and talk about their own feelings. Talk to them about the story: "Lion got really mad in this story. Do you feel mad sometimes?" "What makes you feel better when you are mad?" Teach your child ideas for how to calm down. For example, breathing in and out for 5 seconds, or talking about their feelings with a parent or teacher.

The Great Big World

Show your child new things, and take them to new places. Are there museums nearby? Parks? Interesting neighborhoods? Libraries? See the world through your child's eyes. Talk about the things that they are seeing. When your child is feeling confident, calm, and happy, they will be curious about everything—especially when you are sharing this experience with them.

Big Helper

Your child is watching you and wants to try doing the things you do. When you sweep, give your child the broom (or a dustpan) and let them help. "You are sweeping. What a big boy. Thanks for the help!" This is a way for your child to learn from you. It also helps them know they play an important role in the family. They will feel good about their new skills and feel proud they are "helping."

Let's Dance

Your child needs times to move around and use their arms, legs, and the rest of their body. Put on some music and dance together! You can use scarves or light blankets to wave around while you dance. Try different types of music. Ask your child if the music sounds happy, sad, silly, mad, or scary. Talk about how the different kinds of music make each of you feel. Encourage them to make a facial expression to show the feeling.

Give Me a Break

Your child needs quiet times to relax. Children do not need to be busy all the time. If your child is in childcare, there will be break times. At home, you may need to plan quiet times. Make a comfy nest with pillows, blankets, and books. When possible, cuddle up together and take a break. After lunch, a rest time or a nap may help the rest of the day go more smoothly.

Little Challenges

Little challenges help your child learn to work hard and keep trying (persist). They will need encouragement when they are getting frustrated: "You can do it." "You're almost there—keep trying." Your confidence in your child's skills will help build their confidence. Skills such as learning to ride a tricycle (or bicycle with training wheels), climbing to the top of a structure, or drawing a simple shape offer opportunities for them to learn how to persist.