

LEARNING TO GROW

CENTER ON THE FAMILY ♥ UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Show Your Child that He is Important and Loved

Everyone, but especially young children, needs to feel wanted, loved, and connected to other people. Young children thrive on consistent, loving care from important adults in their lives. Feeling important and loved by someone they know and trust allows children to learn to trust and form relationships with others. It gives them confidence to learn and explore the world on their own, and helps them develop their independence.

Children feel important and loved when they feel respected, noticed, and heard. Know that to your child a simple smile, a gentle touch, time spent together, or kind words from you can mean: “I love you” “I care about you” “You are special.” Your words and actions send powerful messages to your child. The following are simple ways to send these messages every day.

- ♥ **Pay attention to your child.** Spend time together talking and listening; show interest in his interests and activities.
- ♥ **Express your affection often through physical contact.** Enjoy holding and cuddling your child. Offer hugs, kisses, an arm over his shoulder, or a pat on his back.



- ♥ **Communicate and talk to your child often.** Tell your child that you love him. Let him know that you enjoy being with him and think he is great!

This newsletter will focus on ways to show your child how important he is to you. It will also include ideas of age-appropriate activities you may enjoy doing together with your child.

In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ Age-specific information and suggestions about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ Featured activities for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Your baby gains a sense of being important and loved when you respond in a loving way to his cries and other communications. For example, when you gently talk to and pick up your baby when he cries or lifts his arms in the air, he knows by your prompt response, soothing words, and gentle touches that he is safe and that you will take care of him.

Some parents worry that they are spoiling their baby if they respond quickly to his cries. However, research from the National Institute of Health has shown that responding right away to his cries teaches him that others will respond to him in a caring and predictable way. When you



respond quickly, he learns that he is capable of making his needs known and that his needs will be met. These experiences allow him to develop a strong trust in others and a sense of security.

In your interactions with your baby, when you touch, hold, comfort, rock, play with, and talk or sing to him, he learns that he is important and loved. The following are additional ways for you to build this important connection with your child.

- ♥ **Be a safe “home base” for your baby.** Watch how your child crawls away, then comes back to check-in with you. He wants to be sure you are still there and may be looking for some encouragement to explore some more.
- ♥ **Share in his discoveries.** Your baby looks to you to see your reaction as he makes a new discovery—like finding the ball that rolled behind the chair. Seeing your delight and hearing positive encouragement makes him want to explore more and more.



Activity for Infants: *Swaying, Swaying*

Materials: None

What to Do:

1. Sit in a chair with your baby lying on your thighs with his feet pointing toward your stomach.
2. Cradle his head with your hands and gently sway your body from side to side.
3. Gaze into his eyes and talk or sing to him. Your smiles and words may inspire him to coo and grin back at you.
4. The sound of your voice, the feel of your hands, and the sight of your face can reassure and soothe your baby.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

One of the most important ways to show your love to your toddler is to pay attention to the small and big things he says and does. Your toddler is now learning to use his words to express his feelings and thoughts, and he wants to use this developing skill with you. He may use short sentences, gestures, and facial expressions to communicate what he needs or feels, but because he is still learning how to express himself, he may rely on you to interpret what he is trying to say.

When you take the time to actively listen to your child, try to interpret what he says, and respond to him, you are letting him know that his thoughts and feelings are important and matter to you. The following are ways that you can show that you are listening to your child.

♥ **Give your child your full attention.** When you are talking to your child, make sure there are not any interruptions or distractions. Resist the temptation to do other things like check your cell phone,

watch TV, or do housework at the same time.

♥ **Pay attention to his nonverbal language.** Look for emotions, gestures, and actions that your child may not be able to describe to you using words. Ask questions or identify how it made him feel, “That made you pretty mad, didn’t it?” “You seem really happy about that!”



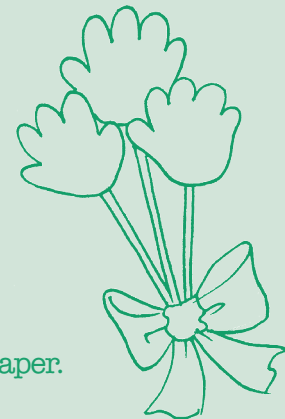
Activity for Toddlers: *Handprint Flowers*

Materials:

- Paper or thin cardboard
- Pencil
- Scissors (for adult use only)
- Jumbo crayons or washable markers
- Masking tape
- Straw or disposable chopstick

What to Do:

1. Trace your child’s hand several times on various sheets of paper.
2. Invite him to color the handprints.
3. Cut out the handprints with scissors.
4. Together, tape each handprint to a plastic straw or disposable chopstick to make a “flower.”
5. Ask him to name some people who are special to him. Discuss with him why they are special people to him. Write one reason on each handprint.
6. Have him give the flowers to those people.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

With today’s busy lifestyles, time spent with your child is precious. Spending time with your child provides both of you with opportunities to learn more about each other. Most of all, it provides you and your child with time to connect with each other,



and it’s these connections that make your child feel loved.

Create some time each day with your child to focus your attention on him, even if it’s just for a few minutes. Make sure that the time spent together is meaningful to you and your child, a time in which thoughts and feelings can be shared. Put the focus on your child and watch him soak up the attention! The following are simple ways to spend time with your child to make him feel important and loved by you.

♥ **Have a little helper.** Have him help you with daily routines such as preparing dinner. While it might be messier and it may take more time in the beginning, over time, as your child becomes your regular helper, this time together “before dinner” can be his special time with you.

(continued on page 6)

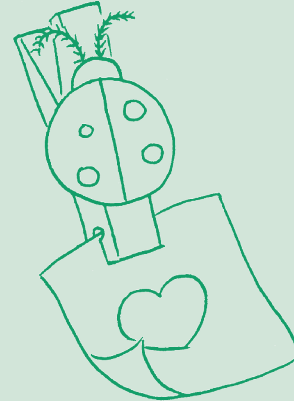
Activities for Preschoolers: *Clothespin Magnets*

Materials:

- Wooden clothespin
- Scissors (for adult use only)
- Felt
- Washable markers
- White glue
- Adhesive magnet strips or recycled magnets

What to Do:

1. Cut out a shape, such as a ladybug, turtle, plumeria, or the first letter of your child’s name, from the felt.
2. Have him decorate the shape with markers or other pieces of felt.
3. Show him how to glue the felt shape onto one flat side of the clothespin. Allow the glue to dry.
4. Attach a small piece of magnet strip or glue a recycled magnet to the other flat side of the clothespin.
5. Have him stick his clothespin magnet on your refrigerator and explain that he can use it to hang his artwork or special messages.
6. Ask him to draw a picture to hang there. Show him how to press and release the clothespin to secure his drawing.
7. Have him talk about the messages or artwork he chose to hang.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development.

Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Develop a close bond with you
- ♥ Feel important and good about himself

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Develop skills needed for writing
- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop his creativity and imagination
- ♥ Recognize math concepts like numbers, sizes, shapes, and sequences

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you do this recipe with your child, show him how to safely handle the items and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Make sure to wash your hands and your child's hands before preparing any food.

Pumpkin-Cheddar Mac 'n Cheese

Adapted from: <http://www.yum-o.org/recipe.php?id=686>

Ingredients:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 pound whole wheat pasta, such as rigatoni or penne 4 tablespoons butter 3 tablespoons flour 1 cup chicken stock 2 tablespoons honey or maple syrup 2 cups whole milk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 teaspoon ground mustard 2 pinches of ground cloves or ½ teaspoon allspice (optional) Salt and pepper, to taste 1 can unsweetened pumpkin puree (14 ounces) 2-½ cups shredded sharp yellow cheddar cheese, divided |
|---|---|



Instructions:

1. Ask your child to help pour the pasta into a bowl and describe how it feels. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, then cook the pasta according to the directions on the box. Drain and keep it on the side. As it cools, ask your child how the pasta has changed (size or texture, etc.)
2. Pre-heat the broiler.
3. Have your child help measure the ingredients and put them into bowls for you to use.
4. Melt the butter in a saucepot over medium heat. Whisk in the flour, cook for 1 minute, then raise the heat a bit and add the chicken stock.
5. Reduce the mixture until almost evaporated, then whisk in the honey and milk.
6. Season mixture with mustard, ground cloves, salt, and pepper. Heat a couple of minutes until the mixture thickens (until the mixture coats a spoon).
7. Whisk in the pumpkin puree, then stir in about 2 cups grated cheese until melted.
8. Combine the pasta with the sauce and arrange in a casserole dish. Have your child sprinkle the remaining cheese on the top of the mixture.
9. Place under broiler to brown, about 10 minutes, (until bubbly).

Preschoolers (continued from page 4)

♥ **Eat meals together.** Turn off the TV, take telephone calls later, and use this time for conversation. Talk about your day, the meal, or activities that you want to do together. The important thing is to spend time together!

Community Resources

101 Ways to Praise Your Child <http://www.kinderteacher.com/101WaysToPraise.htm>

A listing of words you can use to encourage your child.

Developing Self-Esteem http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/self_esteem.html

Kids Health has lots of topics for you to read about, including self-esteem.

101 Ways to Praise a Child

WOW You're spectacular **Now you're flying** Way to go **YOU'RE DARLING** A big kiss **BRAVO** You're special **Super Beautiful** Outstanding **SUPER JOB** I like you **EXCELLENT** Beautiful work **I RESPECT YOU** Great **Good for you** You're sensational **GOOD** Nothing can stop you now **PHENOMENAL** Neat **Dynamite** A+ job **WELL DONE** You're fantastic **HOORAY FOR YOU** Remarkable **Awesome** You're unique **I KNEW YOU COULD DO IT** You're precious **YOU CARE** I'm proud of you **Fantastic job** Creative job **SUPER STAR** You've discovered the secret **YOU BELONG** Nice work **Bingo** You brighten my day **LOOKING GOOD** Great discovery **SUPER WORK** You're on top of it **You are responsible** That's the best **YOU'RE CATCHING ON** You are exciting **YOU MADE MY DAY** Now you've got it **You are fun** Say I love you! **HOW SMART** You're a real trooper **BEAUTIFUL SHARING** Good job **Marvelous** You mean the world to me **THAT'S INCREDIBLE** Terrific **YOU'RE IMPORTANT** Hot dog **You're growing up** You've got a friend **REMARKABLE JOB** Outstanding performance **YOU'RE A JOY** You're beautiful **You tried hard** You make me laugh **YOU'RE A WINNER** You figured it out **YOU'RE A-OK-MY BUDDY** You make me happy **What a good listener** I trust you **HIP, HIP HOORAY** You're a treasure **YOU'RE PERFECT** You're important **You mean a lot to me** You're wonderful Magnificent **YOU'RE A GOOD FRIEND** That's correct **EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE** Fantastic **A big hug** You're on target **WHAT AN IMAGINATION** You're on your way **BEAUTIFUL** You learned it right **How nice** You're incredible **P.S. Remember a smile is worth a thousand words**

Suggested Books

Recommended by Read to Me International www.readtomeintl.org. For more books, visit the public library www.librarieshawaii.org.



Infants and Toddlers

My Love for You by Susan L. Roth

One can hear the loving voice of a parent or caregiver in this book as she assures the child listener of her love. This book is a counting book with a nice surprise.

Hug by Jez Alborough

Little Chimp notices various jungle animals hugging their young, but doesn't experience what they are experiencing. Finally, he cries for 'HUG!'

Preschoolers

Koala Lou by Mem Fox

Koala Lou's mother would tell her she loved her a hundred times a day, until time passes with more babies born to Mother. Koala Lou enters the Bush Olympics and comes to understand that her mother has always and will always love her.

One Smart Goose by Caroline Jayne Church

Down on the farm, one goose stood out. He wasn't clean and shiny like all the other geese. Fox would chase all the other geese, but not the lone goose. In the end, lone goose proves to be a smart goose as he takes care of Fox once and for all.

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