



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Helping All Children Thrive

Did you know that you are your child's first teacher? The most important years of a child's life occur during the first 5 years. In fact, 90% of brain development happens before age five! The nurturing care and experiences that parents and caregivers provide for their child lays the foundation for a healthy sense of self and positive academic outcomes later in life. As your child's first teacher, you are tuned in to his needs, mood, and temperament. This also means that you may notice if he is developing differently from other children his age. If you have a concern about your child's development, resources are available to support you. Speak to your child's primary care physician and advocate for services if needed. Early intervention does not stigmatize or label your child, but rather provides free services that support him in improving his abilities and learning new skills. Early intervention can change a child's developmental path and is likely to be more effective when provided earlier rather than later in life.

Children of all ages, regardless of their developmental abilities, can benefit from a caring environment with access to stimulating activities. You can make a large impact by making small modifications, allowing your child to fully and independently participate in activities. The benefits of making simple modifications include:

- ♥ Providing access to a wide range of learning opportunities
- ♥ Promoting participation with peers
- ♥ Creating meaningful interactions
- ♥ Supporting greater learning opportunities

This newsletter will share helpful strategies for creating an environment with a proactive approach



to modify the environment and adapt materials for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers at different levels of development.

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,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

During the first years of life, over 1 million neural connections in the brain are formed. This is an important time in your child's life, and your interactions with him matter. You can provide engaging activities with little to no materials in your home. When you intentionally arrange the physical space so your infant can participate in different ways, you create an environment where he can learn and thrive. You can do this through:

- ♥ Tummy time - Start newborns on tummy time by placing them belly-down on your chest or across your lap for a few minutes at a time, two or three times a day. As your infant gets older, place him on his tummy on a blanket, ensuring that he's in a safe area away from foot traffic. If your infant shows signs of distress, take a break and then try again. Try placing a small rolled-up towel under his chest and armpits to make it easier for him to lift his head and push up. Place a baby-safe mirror or favorite toy in front of him to encourage him to look up. You can also lie down in front of him at eye level, talking to him to encourage strengthening of his neck, shoulders, arms, and trunk.
- ♥ Setting up an infant water play area outdoors (e.g., shallow pans filled about an inch high) for him to splash and explore. The combination of nature and water can have a calming effect.



*Safety Alert! Children can drown in as little as 2 inches of water. Be sure to supervise your infant closely and empty the water after use

- ♥ Materials and toys that can be seen and reached by your infant. For example, cloth books are perfect for infants who like to place everything in their mouths. Choose a variety of books with bright pictures and rhyming verses. To assist with your infant's development of eye-hand coordination and his development of fine motor skills, you could also introduce board books with sturdy pages. You will find classic stories like "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" and interactive books with flaps and mirrors in board books. In addition, you can modify books to make using them easier for your child to use. See the activity below for more information.

Activity for Infants: *Turn the Page*

What You Need:

Clothespins or popsicle sticks

What to Do:

1. Choose a board book that your infant enjoys looking at.
2. Secure clothespins or popsicle sticks to the corner of each page to make it easier for him to grasp and turn the page.
3. Point out the pictures and allow him to turn the page when he is ready.

*Ensure that these are securely on and supervise your child closely when using.

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



Toddlers

Milestones matter! As you observe your toddler, you may be unsure if he is developing at a typical rate. You can ask your pediatrician for a chart of developmental milestones or download the free Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developmental milestones app (see Resource section on page 6). Sometimes your toddler might need a little more support, and if you make a few small changes, it can make a huge difference! You can help develop his physical, language and literacy, and cognitive development in simple ways such as:

- ♥ Encouraging physical development with movement activities (e.g., stacking cardboard boxes, pillows/mats for climbing, small brooms for sweeping). Sometimes toddlers struggle with stabilizing their trunk while using their arms and hands. Try taping paper to a table or a small desktop easel for stability. The angle of the easel promotes hand and arm strengthening (holding the arm up against gravity). See "Desktop Easel Painting" to create your own desktop easel.
- ♥ Reading to your child to develop his language development and early literacy skills. If your child likes to chew up or tear pages, make the pages stronger by covering them with clear



packing tape or clear contact paper, or by putting individual pages in plastic sleeves or baggies, then re-binding.

- ♥ Providing opportunities for your child to develop his problem-solving skills (e.g., putting together puzzles, using blocks, and figuring out how to accomplish tasks such as spreading out a blanket). Stay close by to support his attempts (e.g., "You can do it. Try turning the puzzle piece. You did it!")?

Activity for Toddlers: *Desktop Easel Painting*

What You Need:

- Medium size cardboard box
- Duct tape and scotch tape
- Scissors or box cutter
- Paint (*optional: flour or cornstarch to thicken the paint)
- Paper

What to Do:

1. Open up the box and cut off one of the small sides of the box.
2. Fold the two cut sides together to form a triangle shape and duct tape along the edge.
3. Attach paper for your child to paint on using scotch tape.
4. *Optional: mix a little flour or cornstarch into the paint to thicken it. This provides more resistance and feedback.



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

Preschoolers

As your young preschooler develops, you may see him asking to play with other children and participate in more elaborate play scenarios. Typically, preschoolers still need lots of support navigating friendship skills and problem-solving conflicts that may arise. Providing access to activities that promote cooperative play and supporting his interactions helps to build his success and has a lasting impact later in life. You can help your child successfully navigate social situations by:

- ♥ Setting up activities that encourage cooperation. For example, bring a ball to the park and invite another child to play catch. If your child has difficulty with catching a ball, try squishy, easy-grip balls and modified positions (e.g., sitting and rolling the ball).
- ♥ Acting out different situations in which your child may need help finding the words to say. For example, have him pretend to ask to join in play. Give him the words, "Can I play with you?" or "Do you want to play cars with me?"
- ♥ Providing time and space to unwind. Playing with others takes a lot of physical and



emotional energy. Your child may need time to wind down in a relaxing space. It can be helpful to set up a quiet space by creating a cozy corner behind a chair, or with a large box and soft pillows, to help your child relax and feel safe.

Activity for Preschoolers: Parachute

What You Need:

Parachute or sheet
Ball(s)

What to Do:

1. Play this game with your child and at least two other players.
2. Have everyone stand around the parachute or sheet and use both hands to hold it tightly at waist level.
3. Lift the parachute up above their heads and down again.
4. Next, add a ball to the middle of the sheet. Tell the players to work together to keep the ball from falling by shaking the sheet.
5. If your child has difficulty grasping the side of the sheet, add a handle using a hair scrunchie by securing the corner of the sheet around the scrunchie.

*Optional: add more balls to the middle for extra challenge



(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 large muscles like neck, arms, and legs
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Builds friendship skills
- ♥ Develop a unique identity

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and his attention span
- ♥ Build verbal skills and vocabulary

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her curiosity about how things work
- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills



Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Praise his efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Healthy Oatmeal Cookies

Adapted from: <https://kirbiecravings.com/2-ingredient-banana-oatmeal-cookies/#recipeBa>

Ingredients:

- 1 cup quick oats
- 1 large overripe banana mashed to a liquid-like consistency
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Have keiki mash the banana. (*If keiki struggles with grasping the fork, try a potato masher).
3. In a large bowl, add oats and mashed bananas. Mix with a fork until it becomes an evenly mixed, thick batter.
4. Mix in chocolate chips.
5. Have keiki shape 8 round balls out of the cookie batter. (*If the texture is challenging for keiki, use a baggie to shape the balls).
6. Place onto baking sheet, spacing about 2 inches apart. Gently press down on each ball so that it flattens into a round disc.
7. Bake for about 15 minutes or until cookies are lightly brown and set.

Resources

CDC's Developmental Milestones

This website provides information about typical milestones for each age from 2 months to 5 years old and parenting tips to support development. Download the CDC milestone tracker app to track your child's milestones directly from your phone!

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>

Hi'ilei Developmental Screening Program is a free resource for ages 0-5 that provides developmental screening and information for families.

<https://health.hawaii.gov/cshcn/hiileihawaii/>



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

See, Touch, Feel: A First Sensory Book by Roger Priddy

This sturdy board book, with images of happy babies, will stimulate curiosity and brain development through sensory play. Babies can see, feel and touch the raised textures in this colorful book.

Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae

Gerald the giraffe wants to dance but his crooked knees and thin legs make it harder you would think. But with some words of encouragement from a friend, he finds the courage to be himself on the dance floor

Preschoolers

Every Body: A Celebration of Diverse Abilities by Shelley Rotner

This book celebrates children of differing abilities. Each page features gorgeous photographs of children moving around their community, using scooters, wheelchairs, walkers, and more.

Can I Play Too? (Little Senses) by Samantha Cotterill

Two boys building with trains get into a disagreement when one of the boys insists on doing this his way. This is a great book for teaching children how to read emotions and build friendship skills.



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