



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

## Environments to Support Your Child

From the moment your child is born, their environment begins to shape the way they see, move, and understand their world. According to Linda Armstrong, author of *Family Child Care Homes: Creative Spaces for Children to Learn*, the environment is defined as everything the child touches, uses, and experiences daily.

To fully experience what your child sees, touches, smells, hears, and interacts with, go into the rooms throughout your home and get down on your hands and knees, on your stomach, or in a low chair. Ask yourself the following questions: "Does this make learning fun? Where are the soft or cozy elements to promote quiet and relaxing play? Is this a safe space? Are the materials accessible?"

Young children thrive in environments tailored to meet their individual needs, which are based on their age and developmental stage. You can create spaces that are individualized and developmentally appropriate for your child by considering:

- ♥ **Safety** – the space is secure and keeps children safe from injury.
- ♥ **Exploration** – the space is organized with age-appropriate, accessible materials.
- ♥ **Learning** – the space is stimulating and engaging, and encourages the development of physical, social-emotional, language, and cognitive (thinking) skills.

In this newsletter, we will offer tips on creating an environment that grows with your child from infancy through preschool, helping your child safely explore, learn, and thrive.



### 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

The environment should match your infant's needs and support their development. To start, think about what your child likes or dislikes, how she can be soothed, what developmental milestones she has mastered, and what she is working on. You can use this information to create different spaces and offer a variety of materials. For example, during awake times, offer brightly colored objects and toys that make noises for her to interact with; when she gets fussy, play soothing music; and as she learns to stand, offer sturdy furniture to pull up on.

Here are some tips to keep in mind:

♥ **Safety** – Arrange furniture and household items so you can always see her. Place your young infant on a blanket near you so you can reach her at all times. Tummy time must always be supervised in case her head falls forward, constricting her airway, or she may fall backward and hit her head when she is trying to sit up.



♥ **Exploration and Learning** - Young infants are becoming more aware of their environment. They use their hands and mouths, and bodies to explore. Your infant may try to grasp an object within reach and bring it to her mouth; this is how she learns about weight and texture. Provide toys and materials that contain no small or loose parts to eliminate choking hazards. Choose toys that are machine-washable or easy to clean, as they are often put in her mouth while she is exploring.

## Activity for Infants: *Floor Time*

What You Need:

Soft surface (e.g., soft blanket, towel, or rug)

What to Do:

1. Place your infant on a soft blanket, towel, or rug on the floor to give her a chance to look at new things.
2. Change her position or the position of the blanket after a few minutes.
3. Notice what your infant is interested in. If she looks at something, talk about it. For example, "You see the fan. It is spinning round and round. Do you feel the cool air?"
4. Wiggle your hand to get your infant's attention.
5. Slowly "walk" your fingers up and around her leg.
6. End the "walk" with a gentle tickle or a soft pat on her tummy.

Variation:

Sit on the floor and hold your infant upright on your lap. Talk about things that you both see, hear, or feel.

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



# Toddlers

Toddlers are wanderers and little explorers. This is a time when she is building skills in all areas. She is beginning to use her large and small muscles in new ways. Your child is developing her sense of self, determining what she can do and where she can go. With this in mind, her environment must be set up to limit the risks involved, yet stimulating enough to encourage her to explore.



Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- ♥ **Safety** - Arrange furniture and household items so you can provide some open space for her to use her growing motor abilities (e.g., walking without tripping over objects). Make sure you can see and reach her at all times. Also, add safety devices throughout the home, such as gates, cabinet locks, and furniture anchors that prevent tipping if climbed on.
- ♥ **Exploration** – Build your toddler's independence by allowing her to access materials by herself. Place heavier toys and materials on lower shelving in a play area so she

can reach them and be able to carry them. Also, you can teach your toddler how to use materials and equipment appropriately, such as "crayons are for coloring" and "paint brushes are for painting."

- ♥ **Learning** – Encourage your toddler's learning by creating specific areas for your toddler to play with certain toys, such as a sensory (or messy) area (e.g., playdough, water, or art), a dress-up area, and a cozy connection area (a soft pillow or cushion on the floor with some puzzles or books in a basket for you to read and be together).

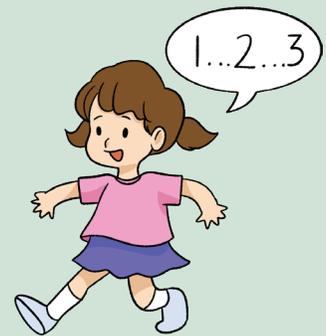
## Activity for Toddlers: *Big Steps*

What You Need:

Large open space

What to Do:

1. Act out the movements of "Big Steps, Little Steps" with your toddler:  
*Big steps, big steps, big steps (Take long steps.)*  
*Little steps, little steps, little steps. (Take small steps.)*  
*Big steps, little steps. BIG STEPS!*
2. After acting out the movements of the poem, have fun with counting. Ask her if she can take three big steps. Count as she does this. Try a different number of steps.



Variation: Repeat the following rhyme as you show your toddler how to jump up and down with two feet:

*Jumping feet, jumping feet, jump, jump!*  
*Up to the sky, away up high*  
*Jumping feet, jumping feet, jump, jump!*

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

# Preschoolers

Preschoolers are active movers and learners, oftentimes using their whole bodies to engage and explore the environment they are in. They move and play with ease. Climbing, running, and jumping are still favorite activities, and the environment they are in needs to be safe for them to actively explore without getting injured. Creating larger play spaces inside and outside is important as she needs more room to build, play, or move around.

Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- ♥ **Safety** – All materials and equipment need to be child-safe. Indoor and outdoor equipment should be designed for preschoolers and should have safety features such as cushioning and railings, as needed. You can also teach basic safety rules, such as “Your feet need to be on the floor,” or “We can run outside, where we have lots of space.”
- ♥ **Exploration** – Create spaces with more access to a variety of materials she is interested in, such as a basket of books on an area rug for reading, building blocks or sorting materials for math, or natural materials from outside placed on a table to investigate for science. Give her lots of time and opportunity to deeply explore



what she is interested in.

- ♥ **Learning** – Incorporate areas and materials that allow your child to create and problem solve. Open-ended materials such as blocks, art, and natural materials allow you to ask questions such as, “What do you think will happen next?” or “Can you tell me about that?” These materials encourage your child to think and process what is happening with her play so she can share it with you.

## Activity for Preschoolers: *What Could It Be?*

What You Need:

- Small box
- Small household objects
- Blanket

What to Do:

1. Find and place different household objects into a box. For example, a comb or spoon, a rubber slipper, a small stuffed animal, and whatever else you want to add to the box.
2. Cover the box with a small blanket and ask your child to place her hand in the box to feel the objects. Have her choose one, but do not take it out of the box. Ask her to describe how it feels, and guess what it is.
3. Have your child place some items in the box and cover them up. Now it's your turn to guess



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

## How This Helps

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

### Physical Development

- ♥ Learn through her senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Feel important and good about herself
- ♥ Develop her unique identity

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase her observation, listening and understanding skills and her attention span
- ♥ Connect words and sounds she hears with what she experiences



### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills
- ♥ Recognize math concepts (sequencing, patterning)

## Kids in the Kitchen

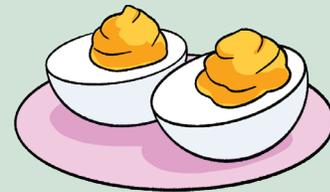
Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as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

### Easy Deviled Eggs

*Adapted from Hawaiian Electric, Eggstra Special*

Ingredients:

- 4 hard-cooked eggs, shelled
- 3 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Paprika
- Optional garnishes: minced parsley, slivered green or red pepper, sliced olives or pickles, capers



Directions:

1. Together with keiki, cut cooked eggs in half; carefully remove yolks and place yolks in a small plastic sandwich bag. Set whites aside.
2. Add mayonnaise, mustard, salt, and pepper to yolks.
3. Close the plastic bag and mix by squeezing the bag until the mixture is smooth and creamy.
4. Cut off a corner of the bag and allow keiki to squeeze the mixture into the reserved egg whites. Sprinkle with paprika and top with garnishes. Makes 4 servings.
5. Enjoy!

## Resources

### *Learning at Home and Homelike Environments*

<https://headstart.gov/learning-environments/article/learning-home-homelike-environments>

This article from Head Start shares many helpful tips about creating a space that is full of safety considerations, learning experiences, and love, all within your own home.

### *Shaping an Engaging Learning Environment*

<https://sesameworkshop.org/resources/shaping-an-engaging-learning-environment/>

This short article from Sesame Street discusses accessibility, indoor/outdoor considerations, and



play materials, with links to childhood milestones so you can see how your child is developing.

## Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### Infants and Toddlers

#### *All Fall Down* by Helen Oxenbury

Infants will love this book, which features very few words but great pictures of babies doing the things they do, such as singing, walking, and, yes, falling down.

#### *Shoes* by Scholastic

Sneakers for the playground, slippers for the beach, and sometimes no shoes. Footwear changes depending on where we are going. Toddlers will be able to relate to this book from Scholastic.

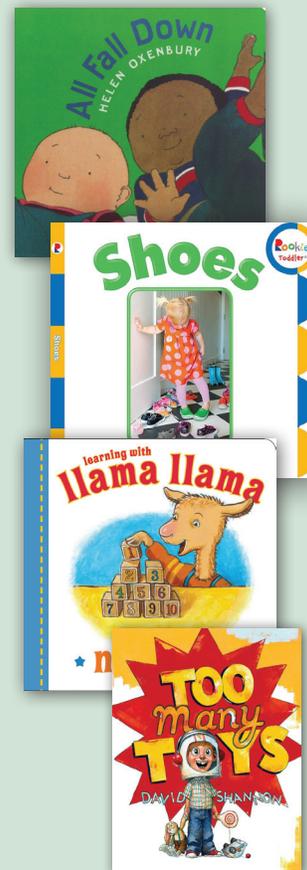
### Preschoolers

#### *Learning with Llama Llama: Numbers* by Anna Dewdney

It's time to tidy up! Join Llama Llama as he helps his mama clean and count the mess he made, by putting toys and books where they go, sorting socks, and being a big Llama Llama.

#### *Too Many Toys* by David Shannon

Spencer has too many toys! His Father and Mother trip and fall over them; the house is overflowing with too many! Spencer finds a place for everything and even gives some away, except one.



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