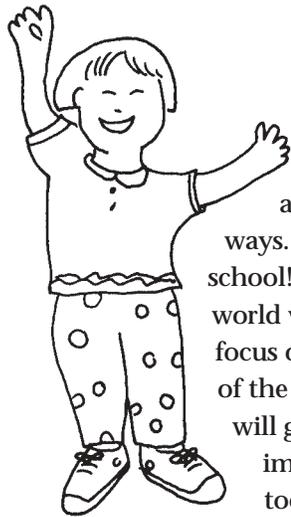


# Early Childhood

(1–4 Years)



## The World Opens Up

Early childhood is a time of big changes for your child. At age 1, he's still a baby in many ways. By age 4, he's ready for pre-school! In these few years, your child's world will open up. He'll begin to focus on adults and playmates outside of the family. His thinking abilities will grow, and he'll be able to use his imagination in play. Your toddler's growing size, strength, and energy will change him into a running, jumping, climbing kid. He's beginning to have a sense of himself as a separate person. He'll want to explore, be active, and

show his independence. This is what early childhood is all about.

### Parents and Health Professionals: Partners for a Healthy Child

Health professionals are your partners in keeping your child healthy. Each of you brings something special to the effort. Health professionals know about child health care, growth, and development. You have the day-to-day experience that makes you an expert on your child. You are also the best person to make sure your child gets the kinds of care she needs. This tip sheet will help you think about some of the most important health issues in early childhood.



### Health Professional Visits During Early Childhood

Your health professional will want to see your child for regular checkups at these ages:

- 1 year
- 15 months
- 18 months
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years

These visits are important. They give your health professional a chance to make sure your child is healthy and growing well. They also are a time for you to ask any questions or discuss your concerns. At these visits, your child will get a physical exam;

hearing, vision, or other screening tests; and one or more of the following immunizations:

- Hepatitis B
- Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTaP)
- H. *influenzae* type b (Hib)
- Polio (IPV)
- Pneumococcal conjugate (PCV)
- Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)
- Varicella (Var) or chicken pox
- Hepatitis A (in selected areas)

## Social Development

Social development is how your child grows in confidence, independence, and good feelings about herself. You'll see these qualities in the way she feels about people and acts around them. Your child is beginning to discover a whole new world of people and things to enjoy. Helping her develop socially will create a strong foundation for later development. Here are some ways to help:

### ***Encourage Your Child to Feel Good About Herself and Others***

- Praise your child every day.
- Encourage her to explore and try new things. Provide safe places for her to do this.
- Within limits, let your child make simple choices. For example, which shirt to wear or which fruit to eat.
- Be consistent and clear about which behaviors are okay or not okay.
- Use discipline to teach and protect your child, not to punish her or make her feel bad about herself. Try time-outs, setting limits, and gentle restraint.

### ***Encourage Good Feelings Within the Family***

- Encourage family members to show affection for each other.
- Do lots of things together as a family.
- Spend special time alone with each child.

### ***Encourage Your Child to Enjoy Other People***

- Join a parent-child play group.
- Take your child to community activities.
- Encourage friendships with other children.

### ***Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional***

- How to help your child express anger and other feelings in acceptable ways.
- Signs that will tell you whether she is ready for preschool.

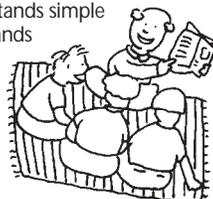
## My Child Is Changing!

- Begins to take steps and talk
- Waves "bye-bye"
- Plays pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo
- Says a few words plus "mama" and "dada"

1 Year

- Feeds self with fingers
- Listens to a story
- Drinks from a cup
- Understands simple commands

15 Months



- Uses a spoon and cup
- Uses two-word phrases
- Throws a ball
- Kisses and shows affection

18 Months

## Eating

Toddlers learn about foods by looking, touching, and tasting. As they get older, children explore new foods by talking about them, helping to shop and cook, and sharing mealtimes with the family.

You may notice that your child's growth and weight gain will slow down, compared to when he was a baby. He might eat a lot one day but not much the next. He'll also show his new independence in choosing which foods to eat. During these years, your child may seem to become a fussy eater. The foods he likes and dislikes might even change from day to day.



### ***Build Healthy Food Habits***

- Offer a variety of healthy foods, such as grains, fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy products.
- Let your child choose what to eat and how much.
- Let your child feed himself. It will be messy but he'll learn a lot. Give him cups, bowls, and spoons that are easy to use.
- Don't give hard, small foods. Small foods like nuts, raisins, meat chunks, and whole grapes can get stuck in his throat.
- If you have a child care provider, make sure she also serves a variety of healthy foods.

### ***Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional***

- Your child's progress in weaning from breast or bottle to cup.
- Any problems your child has with eating or drinking.
- Questions or concerns about your child's growth and development.

## Oral Health

The good habits your child learns now can last a lifetime. Good habits include brushing, flossing, seeing a dentist regularly, and protecting teeth from injury.

### Prevent Tooth Decay

- Teach your child to drink from a cup instead of a bottle. If she sucks from a bottle for a long time, the sugar from the milk or juice stays in her mouth too long. The sugar can lead to tooth decay. Water in a bottle is okay. It has no sugar and won't hurt her teeth.
- Take your child to the dentist for her first visit when she's about 1 year old.
- Until she is 2, clean her teeth twice a day with a small, soft toothbrush. Use just water, not toothpaste.
- When she's 2, begin putting a little toothpaste on her toothbrush. Use a fluoridated toothpaste, and just a pea-size amount. Teach your child to brush her own teeth at age 3. Watch to make sure she brushes correctly and spits out the toothpaste.
- Your own saliva can pass bacteria from your mouth to your child's, so make sure you brush and floss regularly. Don't eat out of a common dish with your child or use the same spoon or fork.



### Protect the Teeth and Mouth from Injury

- Use the safety tips in the box on page 4 to help protect your child's teeth from injury.

### Things to Discuss with Your Dentist or Health Professional

- How often to bring your child to the dentist.
- Whether your child needs fluoride supplements to protect her teeth.
- When and how to floss your child's teeth.

- What to do if your child hurts her mouth or breaks a tooth.
- How to help your child stop sucking her thumb.



## Physical Activity

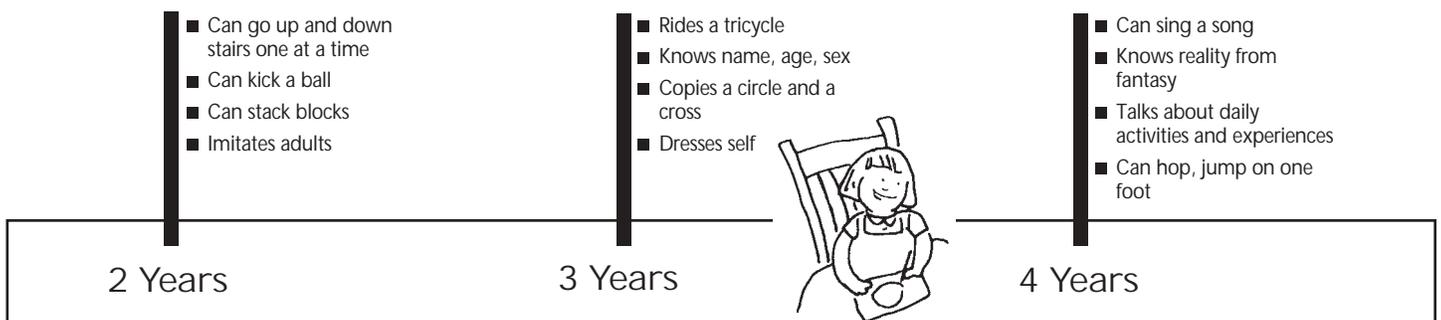
Keeping active isn't a problem for most toddlers and young children. They're always on the go! There are lots of ways to channel this energy in positive ways.

### Build Healthy Habits for a Lifetime

- Try to find physical activities that are fun for the whole family.
- Let your child play as long as he has energy and interest. High energy may come in spurts.
- Limit the amount of time your child watches TV and plays video or computer games.
- Be a role model. Be physically active yourself.
- Look for community programs that encourage physical activity.

### Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- The kinds of activities your child should be able to do.
- Physical activities that are especially hard for your child.



## Safety

Now that your child can move fast, has lots of energy, and likes to explore, you need to be extra careful about her safety. Plan ahead. Think about things you can do to prevent injuries and know what to do if she gets hurt.

### **Plan Ahead**

- Know when to go to the emergency room. Know where the closest one is and how to get there quickly.
- Keep the number of a poison control center near your phone.
- Find out which hospitals are covered by your insurance. Ask about financial assistance if needed.
- Take a class to learn first aid and child CPR.
- Every once in a while, do a safety check of your home and child care facility.



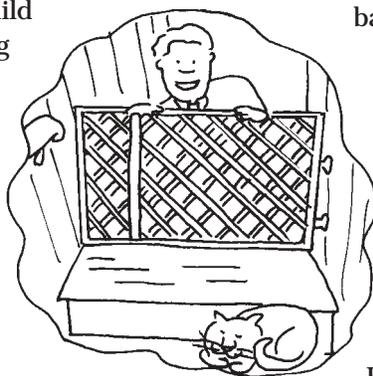
### **Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional**

- A plan for dealing with medical emergencies, injuries, or poisonings.
- The hospitals and clinics your health professional works with.
- Ways to get in touch with your health professional after office hours.

## Keeping Your Child Safe at Home and at Play

### **Prevent Injuries**

- ✓ Put your child in a car safety seat every time he rides in the car. Attach the car seat according to the manufacturer's directions. Be sure that the seat is the right size and type for your child's age and weight.
- ✓ The back seat is the safest place for a child to ride. Young children should never sit in the front seat of a car with airbags.
- ✓ Never leave your child alone on a changing table or other high place.
- ✓ Keep safety gates on stairs and close the latches on windows.
- ✓ Keep sharp objects, such as scissors and pens, in a safe place.
- ✓ Lock up medications, household cleaners, and poisons.
- ✓ Make sure your child can't get at electrical wires, outlets, or appliances.



- ✓ Remove guns from the home or keep them unloaded and locked up.
- ✓ Keep your child away from lawn mowers, overhead garage doors, and electric tools.
- ✓ Teach your child street and playground safety. Warn him not to chase balls into the street.
- ✓ Practice water safety. Teach your child to swim. Empty buckets, children's pools, and bathtubs right after use. Put a fence around any pools.
- ✓ Check playgrounds for safety. Look for things like sharp edges, splinters, and broken equipment. Find playgrounds with soft surfaces like wood chips or grass.

### **Prevent Burns**

- ✓ Keep your child away from hot stoves, fireplaces, grills, heaters,

irons, and hair dryers. Turn pot handles toward the back of the stove.

- ✓ Keep cigarettes, lighters, ashtrays, and matches out of sight and out of reach.
- ✓ Set temperature of household water heater below 120°F.
- ✓ Before your child gets in the bath, put your wrist in the water to make sure it is not too hot.
- ✓ Limit the time your child spends in the sun. Put sunscreen (at least SPF 15) on your child before he goes outside.
- ✓ Install smoke alarms and check them regularly.

### **Prevent Choking**

- ✓ Don't allow your child to play with things that can cover his nose and face, like plastic bags or balloons.
- ✓ Keep your child away from small, hard objects that he could swallow. For example, keep buttons, coins, or marbles out of reach.

## Child Care and Education

Young children need lots of attention and chances to play and learn. Choose child care that gives these to your child. The home or child care center where your child spends his day should be safe and caring. It should have toys, books, and activities that encourage learning.

### **Choose Child Care Carefully**

- Take time to research your child care options carefully. The chart on page 6 can help you choose high-quality child care.
- Be just as careful when you hire a babysitter for the evening. Pick a mature person who can give your child the loving attention he needs and wants.

### **Make Sure the Care Is Right for Your Child**

- Every so often, make a surprise visit to your child care provider. Is the staff caring and gentle with your child? Does your child play well with the other children? Look around the center and think about safety and health issues. Are toys with small parts out of reach of toddlers? Is the center clean?
- Make sure your child is happy there. Does he look forward to going? Does he talk cheerfully about his day?



### **Help Your Child Learn**

- Every day, take advantage of learning opportunities. Talk, read, play, and visit friends together. Go on short trips and neighborhood outings.

### **Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional**

- Warning signs that show that your child is unhappy in a child care program.
- Any problems with hearing, vision, or speech that might affect learning.



# Choosing the Right Child Care

## Step 1: Interview caregivers.

### Call and ask about:

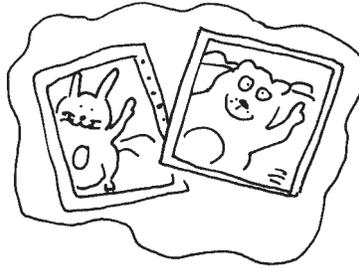
- ✓ cost and financial assistance
- ✓ how many children are cared for
- ✓ size of the adult staff
- ✓ meals and food they provide
- ✓ their license, accreditation, and certification

### Visit and look for:

- ✓ a good relationship between staff and children
- ✓ happy, active children
- ✓ a clean, safe center, inside and out
- ✓ a variety of toys and learning materials

### Ask them:

- ✓ Are parents allowed to visit their child during the day?
- ✓ How do they discipline young children in their care?



- ✓ How do they handle children's emergencies and illnesses?

## Step 2: Check references.

### Talk with other parents who use the center and ask:

- ✓ Is the caregiver always reliable?
- ✓ Is their child happy there?
- ✓ Does the caregiver seem to respect their values and culture?
- ✓ Would they recommend the caregiver?

## Step 3: Make the decision.

### Ask yourself:

- ✓ Will my child be happy and secure?
- ✓ Can the caregiver meet my child's needs?
- ✓ Do the caregiver's values agree with mine?
- ✓ Is this child care suitable and affordable?
- ✓ Do I feel good about choosing this caregiver?

## Step 4: Stay involved.

### Be sure to:

- ✓ make time to talk with your caregiver every day
- ✓ talk with your caregiver about issues and concerns
- ✓ ask about your child's growth and development



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Care Bureau. *Four Steps to Selecting a Child Care Provider*. Administration for Children and Families Web site. Available at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb/faq/4steps.htm>. Accessed April 22, 1999.

