

# Not just child's play

Supporting your child's learning and  
development at home



As a parent, you want to give your child the best start in life. As your child grows and you think about their future, you may wonder how they will do at school, what their life will be like and what you can do to give them a helping hand.



## Giving your child the best start

Supporting your child's learning and development does not have to wait until they start school, and it does not need to involve expensive toys and activities.

A team of researchers\* looked at 3,000 children from when they were aged 3 to the age of 14 and beyond. They found that as early as three years old, children could say and understand more words, think more deeply and were more confident and sociable when their parents had played with them, talked and read stories to them and encouraged them to think, right from birth.

*Research\* has found that what you do at home with your baby or young child has a real and lasting impact on their learning and development.*

The researchers also found that children who had a strong home learning environment when they were younger, did well at school when they were 7, and were still doing well at age 11 and 14.

As a parent, you are your child's first teacher. You make them feel loved and secure, respond to them and know them better than anyone else. This is why what you do with your baby or young child at home has such a powerful effect on their learning and development.

**\*The research referred to in this leaflet is the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education project at the Institute of Education: <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk>.**

# How can I help my child to play and learn?

Playing with your child does not always come naturally to every parent, or you may feel that you do not have time to do this.

However, your child was born ready to explore the world around them and playing with a loving, responsive parent or family member is essential for their learning and development.

*"I sometimes felt a bit silly or embarrassed when it came to playing with her. What did she want me to do?"*

Mother of a one-year-old girl

Here are some suggestions for playing with your baby or child at home – that you might already be doing or that you might want to try out:

- Stop everything else you are doing and give your child your full attention.
- Reduce any distractions – turn off the television, radio or background music.
- Face your baby and get at the same level as them, you may need to lie down with them. Listen to their cooing, gurgling or babbling and respond with questions or comments. You can also try 'mirroring' them, making the same movements that they make.
- Sit down with your toddler and join in with their activity. Respond to their actions and get involved with their play, for example, have a tea party with their favourite toys or play 'shop'.
- Make time to read and enjoy stories together, every day.
- Let your child lead the play. Watch them carefully to find out what they are interested in and join in with what they are doing.
- Give an older baby or toddler safe household objects to explore, for example, brushes, spoons, gloves, paper bags or cardboard boxes.
- Ask your health visitor or Family Information Service if there is a toy library in your local area or arrange to swap toys with family or friends.

# How can I find support in my local area?

What you do at home with your child can be developed and supported through a place at a good quality childcare setting. If you already use childcare, or are thinking about it, it's good to talk about the activities you do at home with your child and share them with the childcare setting.

Your local Family Information Service (FIS) can tell you about the free early education places available in your area and give you information about local children's centres, toy libraries and activities for children.

Information about your local FIS is available from the Family and Childcare Trust website: **[www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis)**.

The Family and Childcare Trust is the charity created from a merger of the Family and Parenting Institute and Daycare Trust. Together we bring over 40 years of experience in campaigning and research into family life and childcare.

We offer a range of information for parents about childcare and family issues, including help with childcare costs. See our website: **[www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parentinformation](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parentinformation)**.

## **National Children's Bureau**

This leaflet is adapted from the NCB resource pack 'Parents, Early Years and Learning: Sharing PEAL with Parents' (2010). [www.peal.org.uk](http://www.peal.org.uk)



## **Family and Childcare Trust**

2nd Floor, The Bridge, 81 Southwark Bridge Road London SE1 0NQ

**Tel:** 020 7940 7510

**Email:** [info@familyandchildcaretrust.org](mailto:info@familyandchildcaretrust.org)

**Follow us on Twitter** @FamChildTrust

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# How young children learn



Singing songs and rhymes



Listening, talking and thinking



Going out on visits



Going to the library



Reading books and  
telling stories



Playing with friends



Imagining and  
pretending



Letting them have a  
go for themselves



Drawing, painting  
and making



Playing with letters  
and numbers



Doing real things  
together

## What makes a difference to young children?

What you do with your baby or very young child at home has a real and lasting impact on their learning and development. Attending a high quality pre-school setting is also linked to better outcomes for young children\*.

Your child is entitled to 15 hours per week of free early education at an early years setting, from the term after their third birthday. This might be a nursery or children's centre, school nursery class, pre-school, playgroup or childminder. The Early Years Foundation Stage gives information about how people who work with babies and young children aged from birth to five years must work to support their care, learning and development. All early years settings should work with you as a partner in your child's learning, including giving you ideas that you can use to support your child at home.

Some two-year-olds are also entitled to a free place. Your local Family Information Service\*\* will be able to tell you if your child is eligible. They can also let you know where places are available locally.

\* The research referred to in this leaflet is the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education project at the Institute of Education: <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk>.  
\*\* See other side for contact details.