



# Tips for Healthy Development

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The following tips for parents and others caring for infants and young children were designed to help children develop to their full potential. Research shows that interactions and experiences in the first six years of life have significant impact on a child's future development.\*

## **Taking Care of Yourself When You are Pregnant is Taking Care of Your Baby.**

- 100 billion brain cells are created in your baby during pregnancy; so when you take care of yourself, you are helping your baby's growth.
- Eat only healthy food, including lots of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and protein.
- Understand that drugs, alcohol, and smoke can seriously harm your unborn baby.
- Rest and light exercise are important for your health.
- Visit your doctor or nurse-midwife monthly, beginning as soon as you think you are pregnant.
- Take prenatal vitamins and folic acid throughout your pregnancy.
- Drink plenty of water and fewer drinks with caffeine.
- Have a dentist check your teeth.
- Avoid people who are sick.
- Ask questions and read to make sure you understand what you need to do to have a healthy baby and how to care for him after he is born.

## **Make Sure Your Children Know They are Loved!**

- Show love with hugs, smiles, kisses and by talking and looking directly into your baby's eyes.
- Remember that your baby cries to communicate with you.
- Understand that giving attention to a baby is not spoiling; when you respond to your baby's cries and coos consistently, his learning is stimulated and he develops trust.
- Imitate his coos and sounds and remember that diaper changing, feeding, bathing and dressing are great times to talk with your young child.
- Say your child's name in a cheerful, caring voice and really listen when she talks.
- Encourage and support your child by showing appreciation for his accomplishments.
- Build your child's self-esteem by teaching her what she can give to others.
- Say "yes" and "I love you" more often than you say "no" or "don't."
- Make sure that your child has regular health exams and receives all appropriate immunizations (shots).
- Seek help from specialists if you have concerns about your child's development or need extra help during times of family stress.
- Demonstrate in ways she can understand that she is unique and special to you.

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## **Remain Calm and Discipline with Love and Consistency**

- Understand that discipline should teach, not punish; it is setting limits with both firmness and kindness.
- Show respect for your child so that he will learn respect for others.
- Learn about stages of child development so that you will know what behavior you can expect at different ages.
- Prepare your child for new situations, so that he will feel confident and secure.
- Create dependable, predictable routines for your child.
- Encourage explanation and curiosity in safe surroundings.
- Remember that infants and toddlers test limits because of their curiosity and eagerness to learn, not to make you angry.
- Distract and redirect your child's attention when his behavior is annoying.
- Avoid calling your child negative names when discussing his behavior.
- Remember that spanking, hitting or shouting may stop behavior immediately but may teach that violence is the way to settle issues.

## **Talk, Read, Sing, and Play with Your Child Every Day**

- Talk to your baby even before she seems to be able to understand what you are saying, and she will soon talk to you.
- Spend time each day reading to your child from infancy, watching for her cues to continue or quit.
- Talk about the pictures and the story and try different voices for the characters in a book.
- Understand that singing and listening to music are good for your child's development.
- Provide a safe place for your baby or toddler to roll, crawl, and explore, and, if possible, "child-proof" the entire home.
- Sit and play on the floor with your child daily, knowing that children learn through play with simple toys and household items such as pots, bowls and wooden spoons.
- Recognize that daily supervised outdoor play, including running, climbing, swinging, and sliding helps children develop strong bodies and minds.
- Realize that when you and your child play "pretend" together, she is learning to use her imagination and understand her world.
- Help your child notice words and other print in the world around you.
- Limit TV time; when you allow your child to watch, sit with him and talk about what you see, remembering that young children should not watch the news or adult programs.
- Get a free library card so that you can visit the library often and check out a variety of books.
- Remember that investing in young children now assures a brighter future for all of us.

\*Information adapted from Early Connections Tips Packet.

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